

# BANDWAGON



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### THIS MONTH'S COVER

The lithograph reproduced on our cover this issue was used by the Sparks Circus in 1916. It was designed and printed by the Erie Lithograph Co.

The design was used in full color as the center spread of the courier used in 1916. The same color center spread as well as front and back covers were used on the 1912 Sparks courier. Original courier in Pfening Collection.

### IN MEMORIAM

Melvin J. Olsen, Indianapolis, Ind., a member of the CHS for over 28 years died on April 24, 1977. Mr. Olsen was a past president of the Circus Fans Association of America, and had been editor of that organization's WHITE TOPS magazine for a number of years.

Mrs. Betty Daw, wife of CHS member Freddy Daw, died April 5, 1977. She had been active for many years with her husband in the operation of the Circus Hobby Hall in Coral Gables, Fla. Mrs. Daw was a circus model builder and was the first woman ever elected to office in the Circus Model Builders.

### New Members

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Sarasota, Florida 33577

Robert A. Hoban 2323  
5331 Moeller  
Norwood, Ohio 45212

Eddie Howe 2324  
P.O. Box 20012  
Riverside, Calif. 92506

Dennis H. Soldati 2325  
97-40 62nd. Dr. Apt. 8E  
Rego Park, New York 11374

Frank B. Michael 2221 (Reinstated)  
3905 St. Rt. 44  
Rootstown, Ohio 44272

J. Robert Scranton 2326  
P.O. Box 1705  
Birmingham, Ala. 35201

Bradd Frank 2327  
P.O. Box 63  
Satsuma, Florida 32089

Rea Leland Ridley 2328  
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Santa Rosa, Calif. 95404

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Geneva, N.Y. 14456

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6350 62nd. St.  
Pinnellas Park, Florida 33565

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122 West Boyd Ave.  
Butler, Pa. 16001

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Greensboro, N.C. 27402

Garley O. Parsons 2334  
106 E. Columbus St.  
S. Charleston, Ohio 45368

Thomas E. Martin 2335  
2033 South 3rd. St.  
Alhambra, California 91803

Barbara Weber 2336  
3080 121st. St.  
Toledo, Ohio 43611

### ARE YOUR DUES PAID

The CHS membership and BANDWAGON subscribers were sent a dues or subscription notice in April. The payment was due on May 1. If your payment has not been received by July 1, 1977 you will be dropped from the mailing list. Only those paid by July 1 will be listed in the new directory.

### Summer Special

12 Big DOUBLE issues of BANNER LINE, World's Only Once A Month Circus Publication  
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### DIRECTORY COMING

Due to the tight budget under which the Circus Historical Society has been forced to operate under in recent years it has not been possible to publish a membership directory since 1971.

An audit for the fiscal year ending April 30, 1977 shows a surplus in the treasury that will just about cover the cost of publication of a new membership directory this summer. Part of the surplus comes from a profit on the CHS convention held in Sarasota, Fla. in February 1977.

Each member will be listed with the same address shown on the address plate used in mailing the BANDWAGON. If you wish a change of any kind please advise the Secretary at once. BANDWAGON subscribers will not be listed and will not receive a copy of the new directory.

### CHS ELECTION IN FALL

As outlined in Article XI of the CHS by-laws President Stuart Thayer has appointed the following nominating committee: Charles H. Amidon, Jr., 636

Salisbury St., Holden, Mass. 01520, Chairman; Richard Flint and Fred D. Pfening III.

If you have suggestions for nominations for this year's election it is suggested that you forward them to Mr. Amidon. Members seeking the office of director of a district can file a petition, with a second by five members in good standing, with the nominating committee. Present directors wishing to continue should advise the committee of their intent to stand for reelection. All such petitions should be in the hands of the committee by August 15, 1977.

### ADDRESS CHANGE

When you move and do not advise the BANDWAGON of your new address in advance your magazine is discarded by the post office and a postage due notice is returned to us with a collect charge of 25¢.

As we have advised in the past, your copy of the BANDWAGON cannot be replaced free.

So please, please advise us in advance, so you will not lose your copy and we will not have to hand over 25¢ to the postal service.

### BACK ISSUES OF BANDWAGON

1966 all issues but March-April  
1967 all issues available  
1968 all issues available  
1969 Jan.-Feb.; July-Aug.; Sept.-Oct.  
1970 all issues available  
1971 all issues but May-June  
1972 all issues available  
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# THE FLOYD AND HOWARD KING RAILROAD CIRCUSES 1925-30

by Joseph T. Bradbury

## Part I - Walter L. Main Circus 1925

*Foreword - This is the first of six installments which will tell the story of the flat car type railroad circuses owned and operated by the King brothers, Floyd and Howard, during the seasons of 1925 through 1930. Each installment will cover a single season of circus operation by the Kings. Only a brief summary will be given of the gilly-tunnel car railroad shows the brothers had on the road for the six previous seasons, 1919-24, although a detailed account of these circuses would make an excellent project sometime in the future. For an overall view of the Kings' circus career the reader is urged to consult the excellent article by Tom Parkinson, "Floyd King, Circusdom's Historic Personage" which appeared in the May-June 1966 Bandwagon.*

*Considerable information contained in this series comes from a remarkable taped interview with Floyd King on Dec. 5, 1964 which was conducted by CHS Bob Brisendine using questions submitted by the author and others. Mr. King was able to recall many details concerning his circus activities of 40 years ago at the time, however, naturally due to the considerable time span between these events and the interview his memory was somewhat dimmed on a few matters but it is truly remarkable he was able to recall so much.*

*Both Kings are now gone. Floyd died*

*in 1976 at the age of 88, and Howard, who was four years older, passed on several months earlier. The 10 and 15 car shows these men owned were some of the final examples of that type of circus which at one time in circus history were quite plentiful playing the smaller towns and villages throughout the land.*

## The Gilly-Tunnel Car Circuses 1919-24

In 1919 Floyd King purchased a 2 car gilly type circus from William "High Grass Bill" Campbell at Enid, Okla. It had been titled The Campbell Circus but King changed the name to the Great Sanger Show. Floyd says the price was \$4500.00, of which he paid \$2500.00 in cash and the balance after it was on the road for a while. He called his brother, Howard, who had only been in circus business for several years including a couple of seasons with John Robinson, to come and take

**Photo No. 1 - Harris Bros. Circus on lot, season of 1924. Photo appears to have been taken in early season, possibly on opening date. Midway crowd is in foreground; in back (from left) are sideshow bannerline with portion of sideshow top, big top with new canvas, and pit show, also with new canvas. Pfening Collection.**

over the road managership of the show. For the next six seasons Howard would stay with the show as manager while Floyd would serve as the advance agent. The two brothers became partners from the beginning in the ownership and operation of the show. Floyd never did reveal the exact percentage each had, but he seemed to hold the upper hand and make the top decisions.

In the interview Floyd described the two car show which he had purchased from Campbell. It had one sleeping car and one baggage car. In the latter was loaded all of the show's equipment and animals. King said there were 3 or 4 small wagons. One little wagon loaded the lighting equipment, gas type Bolte and Weyer, but once on the lot this was removed and they would use the vehicle as the ticket wagon. One wagon used to load and haul seating would roll right into the baggage car while two others would have their wheels removed and loaded into it. These were little iron wheeled wagons such as farmers used and would make a number of trips at each stand carrying the show's equipment to and from the lot. King said that using an ordinary 80 ft. baggage car you could load the equivalent of a 10 car circus if it was all gillied.

The title of Great Sanger Show was acquired by purchasing stocks of unused billing paper of a former circus



with that title from a printing house. The Sanger title was used again in 1920 and for part of the 1921 season. The Great Sanger Show in 1920 had two major tents, the big top, 70 ft. round with one 40 and two 20 ft. middles, and sideshow, 50 ft. round with two 20's. Before the end of the 1921 season the supply of Sanger paper ran out so the title was switched to Hugo Bros. by purchasing paper from the National Printing Co. which still had on hand unused stock from the 1915 show of that name.

In 1922 the Kings made a deal with M. L. Clark to lease his title, the elephant, Mena, a camel and other animals. According to Floyd, Clark was to get five percent of the profits and upon conclusion of the season old M. L. was paid five grand which in those days was big money.

In 1923 they acquired another paper title, Rice Bros., from the Erie Printing Co. Floyd believes this was the best title their show ever used. The Rice paper lasted only a season and for 1924 they came up with the title of Harris Bros., one they made up, and for the first time there was no old paper bearing that name.

The Harris Bros. show in 1924 used a total of four cars. Some sources believe the show actually had five, the maximum permitted to travel in passenger service, but Floyd insisted in his 1964 interview they never used over four. There is much confusion as to when the show train was increased to more than two cars. At one place in the interview Floyd says they used only two cars until it was enlarged to four in 1924 but another time he says the show added single cars until it reached a total of four. The almost total absence of known photographs of King rail equipment in the years 1919-24 make it virtually impossible to know with certainty the number of cars used each season. Hopefully, in time such photographs will surface to clear the confusion.

The *Billboard* in March 1920 said the Kings got an 80 foot tunnel car but did not say from where. Floyd told Tom Parkinson in 1953 that he purchased the Sparks 80 ft. baggage car in 1923 which gave him a total of four. He also indicated to Parkinson that his show was on five cars at one time, but as mentioned before he insisted he only used four with Harris Bros.

King says the four cars used by Harris in 1924 consisted of one standard sleeping car which they had bought from the Pullman Company in Chicago. Another which had formerly been an advertising car with Barnum and Bailey was used as a combination sleeper and dining car. One baggage car was an 80 ft. so called tunnel car which had been purchased from Sparks Circus. It had doors at each end which would open permitting small wagons to be loaded and removed from



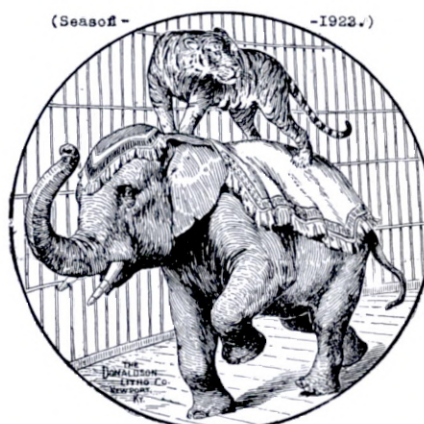
Photo No. 4 - Floyd King picked up this letterhead design from the Erie Litho Company and printed it, naturally, on pink

paper. The title is in red, outlined in black, the animals are orange. Pfening Collection.

the car. The other baggage car had been purchased from the Santa Fe Railroad and according to King it likewise had doors at either end so that wagons could be loaded at one end of the car, move through it, and on into the other car. This car also loaded the elephants and other lead stock as well as the equipment which had to be gillied to the lot on the small "knock-down" wagons.

Describing the 1924 Harris Bros. Circus King recalled, "Well, believe it or not, we have five elephants with the show, one, a great big one and the others quite small, about 5 or 6 years of age. Four cars and five elephants—and we had 8 head of baggage horses. They would be used in teams of four and would haul the wagons to the show grounds. After a load they would double back for another wagon or bring the gilly wagons back empty and pick up another load. We had one camel and three small cages of animals, a male lion, tiger, and I believe, a hyena, plus a cage of monkeys".

During the six seasons of gilly-tunnel car operation the show never paraded. Although some shows of this type did parade, notably Elmer Jones' Cole and Rogers in the late 20's, King felt a gilly-tunnel show just didn't



Part of the Menagerie with the Great Rice Bros. Shows to show in Lebanon Thursday, September 20, 1923.

Photo No. 3 - This rather plain newspaper ad was used by the King Bros. on their Rice Bros. Circus in 1923. Pfening Collection.

have enough equipment or animals to make a decent parade showing. Instead the King show always featured a free act on the lot to draw a crowd.

The *Billboard* gives few details on the Harris show but does say that in

Photo No. 2 - Exterior of Harris Bros. big top, season of 1924, during opening spec. Prima donna is seated atop the elephant at right and appears to be singing. Note reserve seat section at right uses star

backs which were customary on many shows in those days. Traditional bleachers used for general admission or "blues" can be seen in center background. Pfening Collection.





**Photo No. 7 - Walter L. Main clown band rode this lion cage in the 1925 parade. The wagon was on the Harris Bros. Circus in 1924. Although this photo appeared in the 1926 printed program, it would have been taken the year before. Joe Bradbury Collection.**

addition to the big top there was a sideshow, 60 ft. round with two 30's, and a 20 x 20 pit show.

The six seasons of gilly show operation were very profitable for the Kings and especially 1924 was lucrative.

#### **The 1925 Walter L. Main Circus**

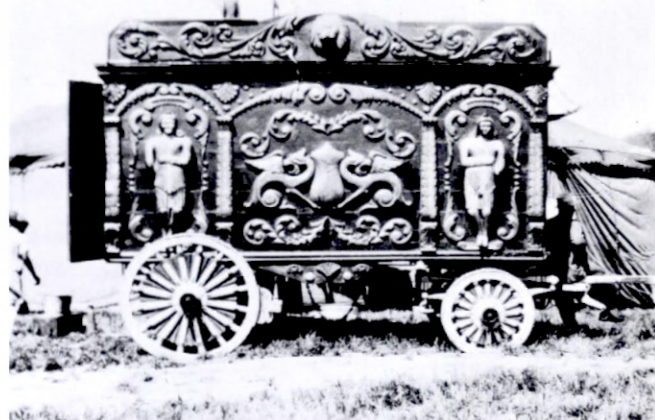
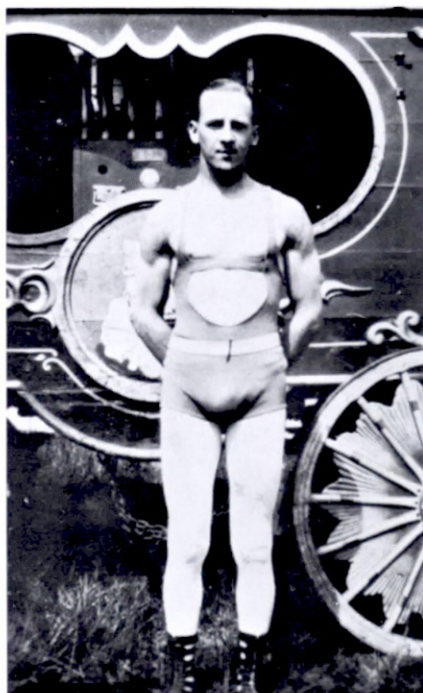
Upon conclusion of the 1924 season Harris Bros. was sent into winter quarters in Louisville, Kentucky at the same location, North Jackson Street and River Road, where the show had spent the previous winter. The King brothers had decided to convert their four car show which had moved in passenger service to a ten car, flat car type, circus which would travel in freight service. An early decision was made to shelve the Harris title and go for a well known name which would be complimentary to the size show they would frame.

As soon as it became known that the Walter L. Main title would be available for 1925 the Kings contacted Mr. Main about its use for their new show. The Walter L. Main title had been in use off and on for over 35 years, by Main personally as well as others. For the past six seasons, 1918-24, the title had been leased by Andrew Downie for his 15, later 20, car circus. Downie sold his show in the fall of 1924 to the Miller brothers of Marland, Okla. who said they would use the physical equipment on their revival of the 101 Ranch Wild West Show scheduled to go out in 1925. Downie announced his retirement thereby returning the title to Main. In a letter published in the Oct. 25, 1924 *Billboard* Walter L. Main stated that the contract between Andrew Downie and himself whereby Mr. Downie leased the Main title, would expire the first of next year and that the title has not been leased to anyone

beyond that time, although several responsible circus men have been corresponding with him regarding the use of the name for next season. Evidently others in addition to the Kings were interested in the Main title.

In his interview, Floyd King, said that they considered the Walter L. Main title to be a great one especially in the east and New England where they planned to route their show in 1925. He said they were successful in leasing the title from Mr. Main for the season for \$75.00 a week. The arrangement

**Photo No. 6 - Unidentified performer standing in front of small air calliope wagon on Walter L. Main Circus in 1925. Wagon is believed to have been loaded in the tunnel car of the 1924 Harris Bros. Circus. This is the only known photograph of the wagon which appears to have not been used after 1925. Joe Bradbury Collection.**



**Photo No. 8 - Two Statue Tableau wagon on Walter L. Main lot about 1925. This wagon was purchased from Sparks Circus and used as the sideshow bandwagon in the 1925 street parade. Pfening Collection.**

was satisfactory to both parties and everything went fine between them during the first season. Although King didn't mention this, in all probability they used billing paper that had earlier been used for the Downie version of the Walter L. Main show. The Kings billed their show heavily, designed new advertising couriers and newspaper mats, and no doubt new styles of paper.

In framing the new ten car circus King says that only two of the four Harris Bros. cars were used, the sleeping car, and the combination sleeper-lunch car. Acquired elsewhere were one advertising car, two stocks, four flats, and one sleeper. When fully assembled the new 1925 Walter L. Main Circus would travel on one advertising car in advance, and 9 cars back, consisting of 2 stocks, 4 flats, and 3 sleepers.

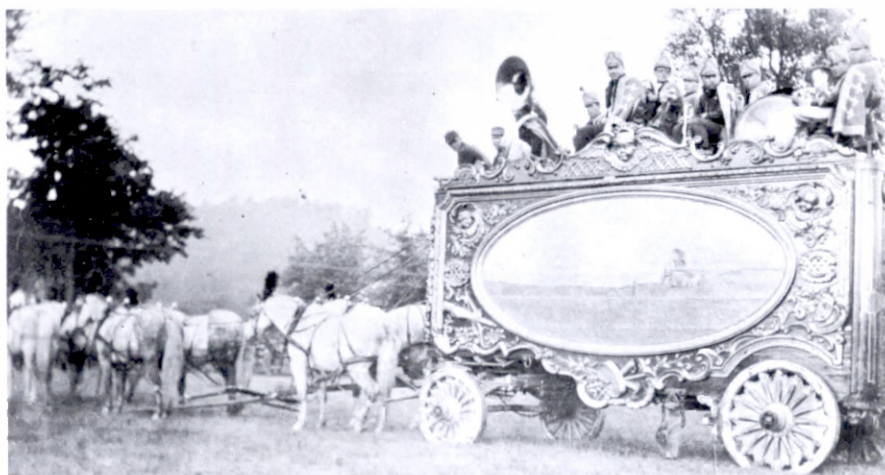
Two stocks and four flats came from the American Circus Corporation in Peru, Indiana, but the source of the advertising car and sleeper was not mentioned in the interview and is not known to the author. Quite possibly both came directly from railroads.

While Howard minded the quarters in Louisville Floyd took off in search of circus equipment. His first trip took him to Peru, Ind. to visit Jerry Mugivan of the American Circus Corporation. Although there was much excess circus equipment available for sale mainly because of the ACC's reducing the number of their circuses from 4 to 3 in 1923 Mugivan seemed reluctant to discuss the sale of any equipment with King. Finally Mugivan suggested that Floyd let his brother run the show they had anf for him to come to work for the ACC as general agent of Sells-Floto. When Floyd refused the offer then Mugivan agreed to sell considerable circus

property. In addition to the 6 rail cars mentioned before, Mugivan sold King a steam calliope which had been used on John Robinson Circus as late as 1922, a pole wagon, stringer wagon, seat wagon, and about 20 head of baggage stock. This equipment and animals were promptly shipped to the Louisville quarters.

Floyd next went to Sarasota to talk with Charles Ringling about purchasing several tableau-den wagons which were stored at the old Ringling quarters in Baraboo. King had seen the wagons stored in a portion of the old winterquarters where they had kept the baggage horses. It was several miles from downtown Baraboo and circus hands called the place Icicle Hill. Ringling priced the wagons at \$750.00 each and King says he bought four, writing out a check on the spot for \$3,000.00. These were former Ringling Bros. tableau-dens, which opened only on one side, the other being very heavily covered with huge carvings. Circus historians have long believed King purchased only three tableau-dens from Baraboo, the three that appear in photo No. 10, however in the set of 1925 parade photos printed here there is definitely a tableau wagon, see photo No. 13, which we cannot account for. It does not appear in any other photos of the King rail shows. It might well be the "fourth" wagon King says he got from Baraboo. The rather poor photo we have of it makes it impossible to tell if it was a tableau-den or another type of parade wagon. Ringling told King that he would have his cousin, Henry Moeller, in Baraboo, load the wagons on system flats to be shipped to Louisville for him. At the same time King was in Sarasota he mentioned to Mr. Charlie he was also interested in some of the excess wagons and possibly wardrobe at the Ringling-Barnum quarters in Bridgeport, Conn. Charlie said he would have to check on this with his brother, John, who was in New York and advised he would let him know about this later.

When King was in New York on a business trip a few weeks later he got a wire from Charles Ringling telling him to go to Bridgeport and pick out what wagons and wardrobe he wanted. King went immediately and made purchases totalling 5 G's. In his interview King said that in addition to considerable wardrobe he got four wagons. Two he recalled by name, the Russia Tableau and a large tableau wagon which had a painting on the side surrounded by carvings outlining an oval. Photos which have turned out picture only these two wagons but if King's memory was correct and there were four wagons involved there are these possibilities. The 1925 show had a water tank wagon which according to a photo inscription says it was once on Forepaugh-Sells and in all probability this one came from either the Baraboo



**Photo No. 9 - Large Oval Tableau (Former Ringling Bros. No. 5) ready for street parade on the Walter L. Main lot in 1925. This wagon was purchased from Ringling-Barnum at Bridgeport and was used during the 1925 season to carry the No. 2 band or costumed performers.**

or Bridgeport quarters. A fourth wagon from Bridgeport could have been of the baggage variety. In any event King's memory had it that four wagons came from Baraboo and four from Bridgeport.

Floyd's final trip in search of wagons and equipment was to Macon, Ga. to see Charles Sparks owner of the 20 car Sparks Circus in quarters there. From Sparks he purchased two tableau wagons, one with two large statues on the side, the other the familiar Sea Serpent wagon. Also at same time he got four large baggage wheels with wooden hubs (the tendency now was to go from wooden hubs to

iron hubs) which were loaded in one of the wagons and shipped to Louisville and used to build a light plant wagon.

Somehow Floyd recalls purchasing only the Sea Serpent tableau, one he remembers well saying it was rather short, about 14 ft. long, which had been built in Morristown, Tenn., and about the time of the interview had recently been added to the wagon collection at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo. The wagon with the two statues on the side definitely came from Sparks. Interestingly, only the two statue tab shows in 1925 photos. Possibly King's memory is correct in that he purchased only one wagon from Sparks at the time. He could have gotten the other later and forgotten about it. In any event two former Sparks wagons were on the King railroad shows.

Some historians once expressed doubt that the tab-dens from Baraboo came to the King show in 1925, feeling that 1926 might be a more appropriate date, however this item in the Dec. 20, 1924 *Billboard* should dispel these doubts. It read as follows, "Baraboo was treated to a sight familiar some years ago when a number of big circus wagons of the old Ringling Bros. Circus creaked through the streets on way to the railroad yards. Wagons had been stored at the former winterquarters. Reports have it they were sold to

**Photo No. 10 - Three of the former Ringling-Barnum tableau dens that the Kings purchased at Baraboo are shown on the Walter L. Main lot at Presque Isle, Maine, August 11, 1925. From left are Wolf and Birds (Ringling No. 51), Winged Dragon (or lion) (Ringling No. 37), and Small Oval (Ringling No. 49). Pfening Collection.**





Reproduced above is the No. 1 advance car of the Walter L. Main Circus, now on its 46th annual tour. The car is one of the flashiest en tour. It is painted a Pennsylvania red and trimmed in gold leaf. Adhering to the old circus idea some magnificent reproductions of famous masterpieces embellish the car, painted and decorated by Vic Peralta, the well-known circus scenic artist, for many years connected with the Norris & Rowe and Buffalo Bill shows. Reading from left to right, standing: Al Clarkson, manager; Dan Spade, chef; H. Cheveront, S. Shorts,

another circus." Also photos taken on the 1925 Walter L. Main Circus definitely confirm these Baraboo wagons were on the show the first season.

The Peru, Baraboo, Bridgeport, and Macon wagons plus some which had been used on the 1924 Harris Bros. Circus and others constructed at the Louisville quarters made up the wagon roster of the Walter L. Main Circus in 1925. It seems like a lot of vehicles to load on the four flat cars which according to *The Billboard* were of semi-steel construction, 66 ft. long. Possibly they were of that length but most cars of this type were around 60 or 62 feet long.

Two rather small wagons which had been loaded in the Harris Bros. tunnel car were used on the new flat car circus. One was a ticket wagon which had been built in Louisville the previous winter. The other was an air calliope wagon shown in photo No. 6. Also three cage wagons which had been on Harris Bros. were used in 1925. According to the late W. H. Woodcock Sr. these three constituted all of the cages in the 1925 Walter L. Main menagerie. The tableau-dens from Baraboo were used for baggage and parade purposes only.

In addition to the light plant wagon, *Billboard* sources indicated two or more other baggage wagons were built at the Louisville quarters in the winter of 1924-25.

With all available information we come up with the following unofficial

**Photo No. 5 - Walter L. Main advertising car, season of 1925. This photo appeared on Page 72 of the May 23, 1925 *Billboard*. It is reproduced through courtesy of Marlin D. Weaver. Joe Bradbury Collection.**

roster of wagons used on the ten car Walter L. Main Circus in 1925. The total number is 21 which was approximately the number carried on other King owned ten car shows later in the 1920's. Unfortunately no photos of the 1925 loaded flat cars have turned up which could give us a more accurate account of the wagons used that season.

1925 Walter L. Main Circus Wagon List and Source

(Parade Type Vehicles)

1. Sea Serpent Tableau (from Sparks Circus, Macon, Ga.)
2. Two Statue Tableau (from Sparks Circus, Macon, Ga.)
3. Large Oval Tableau (Ringling No. 4) (from RBBB, Bridgeport, Conn.)
4. Russia Tableau (from RBBB, Bridgeport, Conn.)
5. Wolf and Birds tableau-den (from Baraboo, Wis.)
6. Winged dragon tableau-den (from Baraboo, Wis.)
7. Small Oval tableau-den (from Baraboo, Wis.)
8. Tableau (undetermined source, Baraboo or Bridgeport)
9. John Robinson steam calliope (from Peru, Ind.)
10. Air calliope (on 1924 Harris Bros. Circus)

(Baggage and cage wagons)

11. Ticket wagon (on 1924 Harris Bros. Circus)
12. Cage wagon (on 1924 Harris Bros. Circus)
13. Cage wagon (on 1924 Harris Bros. Circus)
14. Cage wagon (on 1924 Harris Bros. Circus)
15. Pole wagon (from Peru, Ind.)
16. Stringer wagon (from Peru, Ind.)
17. Seat wagon (from Peru, Ind.)
18. Water wagon (from Baraboo or Bridgeport)
19. Light plant wagon (built winter of 1924-25 at Louisville)
20. Baggage wagon (built winter of 1924-25 at Louisville)
21. Baggage wagon (built winter of 1924-25 at Louisville)

Naturally, the possibility exists the show could have had one or more wagons which might have come from Bridgeport or built by the show's winter quarters forces in Louisville.

Considerable money was spent in acquiring an outstanding group of historic parade wagons and the 1925 Walter L. Main Circus had probably the most spectacular street parade of any 10 car show in history. It was the intention of the King brothers to have a first rate street spectacle to sell their new flat car show to the public and the parade did just that. All during the season the show got splendid newspaper reviews on the parade. Locals praised the size and quality of the parade.

The Russia tableau was built by the Bode Wagon Works of Cincinnati in 1903 for Ringling Bros. It served on that show through the 1918 season and was in the final street parades of the combined Ringling-Barnum show in 1919 and 1920. It was stored at the Bridgeport quarters after street parades were abandoned in 1921.

The large oval tableau wagon which also came from Bridgeport had formerly been Ringling Bros. No. 4 and was built for that show in the 90's, probably by Moeller Brothers of Baraboo. The wagon originally had a carved figure inside the large oval but this had been removed by time the Kings got it. Various paintings appeared inside the oval later on. The wagon had served on Ringling Bros. through 1918 and was on Ringling-Barnum in 1919-20.

The three tableau-dens that came from Baraboo were part of a set of cages built by Moeller for Ringling Bros. in 1893. The detailed history of these wagons was covered in a well illustrated article by Richard E. Conover and Stuart Thayer entitled "The Ringling Cages of 1893" published in the May-June 1969 *Bandwagon*. The three tab-dens purchased by the Kings were former Ringling Bros. Nos. 51, 37, and 49 and are shown together in photo No. 10. These were heavily carved on one side and had attractively painted

panels which covered the bars on the opposite side. None of these wagons were ever used as cages while on the King shows in the 20's. They all carried a regular baggage load of properties and were used in the parade. For identification purposes they are generally known as the Wolf and Birds (No. 51), Winged Dragon (No. 37) and Small Oval (No. 49) so called because of the carvings on the sides. Paintings of animals usually appeared inside the carved outlines on the sides. All of these wagons had been used by Ringling Bros. for a number of years, possibly through the 1917 season, but they did not go out on the final 1918 Ringling Bros. show which upon conclusion of the season went into quarters at Bridgeport, Conn. where Barnum & Bailey wintered rather than returning to Baraboo.

The Sparks two statue tableau was built for Sparks Circus about 1912 and was used on that show for a number of seasons, possibly as late as 1924. The builder is not known to the author but the wagon has a very strong "Bode" look and may have been built by that well known Cincinnati firm.

The Sea Serpent tableau which also came from Sparks was built for that show about 1910 and used until it was sold. In 1922 it was the Sparks ticket wagon. Some sources have claimed the wagon was built by Sullivan & Eagle of Peru, however Floyd King in his interview said it had been built by a Morristown, Tenn. firm.

The steam calliope which came from the American Circus Corporation in Peru was a beautiful, heavily carved, wagon which had been built by Bode in 1917 for the John Robinson Circus and used by that show through the 1922 season. When the ACC cut down from 4 shows to 3 in 1923 the wagon became surplus.

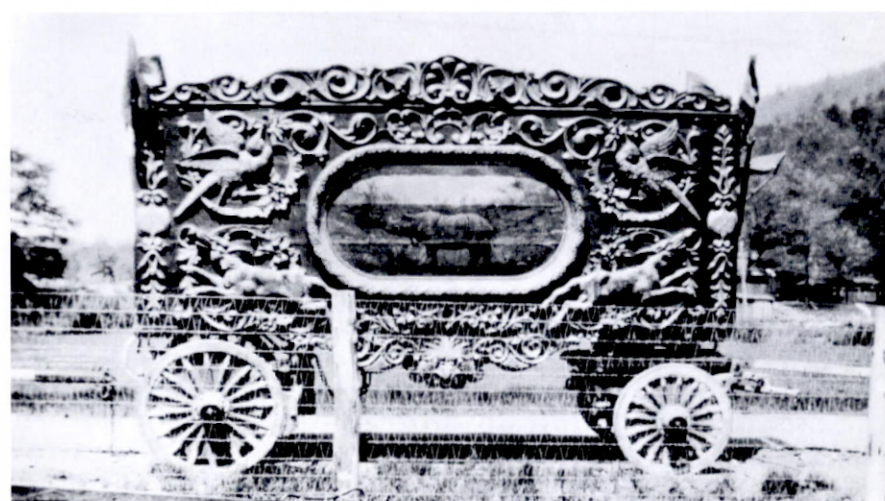
The small air calliope pictured in photo No. 6 is an interesting wagon. This is the only photo of it which has turned up and evidently 1925 was the only year it was used by the Kings on the flat car shows. This photo came to me from the late W. H. Woodcock, Sr. and I questioned him about it, wondering if it was correctly identified. He replied that he was positive it was taken on the 1925 Walter L. Main Show but didn't know what happened to it after then. He felt it was built for use on the 1924 Harris Bros. Circus probably by the show's own winter quarters' shops.

As mentioned before, the 1925 parade set printed here pictures one tableau wagon which is not completely identified. It is shown in photo No. 13, the wagon immediately behind the Russia wagon. What happened to it following the 1925 season is not known to the author. Possibly it was destroyed in an accident, dismantled for some reason, or some other unknown disposition made of it.

Approximately 40 head of baggage stock were carried on the 1925 show. A *Billboard* report in the early spring of 1925 says that the show purchased a "carload" of horses in Missouri. A good possibility is that they came from the Williams P. Hall farm in Lancaster, Mo. The Missouri shipment, plus the 20 from Peru, and the 8 on hand from the 1924 Harris Bros. Circus gave the Walter L. Main show adequate stock for moving the wagons to and from the lot as well as parade purposes.

Photo coverage is not complete enough to determine the entire parade lineup for 1925 but the set printed here does give considerable insight. The No. 1 big show band (split into two sections) rode the Russia tableau pulled by an 8 horse hitch. It appears the wagon was painted a light color, probably white with gold leaf carvings. The No. 2 band rode the small oval tableau (Ringling No. 49) in the parade set, pulled by a four horse hitch. A photo appearing in the 1926 program which was surely taken in 1925 shows the No. 2 band atop the large oval tab (Ringling No. 4). The large oval tab in the set here shows it pulled by a 6 horse hitch and costumed performers on the top. The so called "unidentified" tableau was pulled by 4 horses and appears to have also costumed performers atop. The sideshow band rode the Sparks two statue tableau and the clown band was on the lion cage. In the parade set the steam calliope is bringing up the rear pulled by a truck as was often the case in those days. This truck must have been a local dray hired for the job as there is no evidence the 1925 Walter L. Main Circus carried a truck of its own. It is assumed all of the parade type vehicles as shown on the wagon roster appeared in the daily march. Baggage horses handled the larger vehicles and ponies the smaller wagons.

**Photo No. 11 - Closeup of Wolf and Birds Tableau (Ringling No. 51) on Walter L. Main lot about 1925. Pfening Collection.**



The *Billboard* had very little news of the King brothers circus activities in the fall and early winter of 1924, the first notice of the new Walter L. Main show coming in the Dec. 27, 1924 *Billboard* under the general listing of "Where They Are Wintering" which reported as follows: "Walter L. Main Circus, King Bros. managers, at North Jackson Street and River Road, Louisville, Ky." Although no details of the new King show had appeared as yet the Jan. 10, 1925 *Billboard* carried the following large advertisement.

"WALTER L. MAIN CIRCUS. Want: Circus performers in all lines. High class Novelty acts, Japanese Troupe, double trapeze, iron jaw, contortionists, comedy and straight jugglers. Hurdle mule riders. Comedy roller skaters, bicycle riders, barrel jumpers, family acts and prima donna. FOR SIDE SHOW, Freaks, curiosities and oddities. Pin heads. Colored musicians and band leaders. Prof. Bright Communicate. Up-Town Wagon attractions. Side show people, address - Doc Ogden, 206 W. Walnut St., Louisville, Ky.

"MUSICIANS - for big show band and hot air calliope player. Address John Griffin, 1623 Fenwick St., Augusta, Ga.

"BIG SHOW boss canvasman. Steam calliope player and circus blacksmith that can shoe horses. Wrestler for concert. Address, King Bros., Managers, Walter L. Main Circus, Jackson & River Streets, Louisville, Ky."

The Jan. 31, 1925 *Billboard* finally carried a major article about the show which was headlined, "WALTER L. MAIN CIRCUS. Being Whipped Into Shape for 46th Annual Tour. Al Clarkson Engaged as Car Manager." The story went on to say that a complete new outfit will fly the W. L. Main banner in 1925. The King brothers are spending a great deal of money in building and assembling circus equipment. Two score mechanics and workmen have been employed in outfitting the show. The advance car

has arrived and is one of the finest and best equipped in the realm of the white tops. The blacksmith shop is under the direction of George Hubers, and Sam Burgess is in charge of the woodworking department. Three new baggage wagons have been constructed since the holidays. Vic Peralta, well known circus painter and decorator, is in charge of the paint department with half a dozen assistants. Bert Carroll and Mark Smith, superintendents, expect to have the circus canvas ready for the road in late March. The big top is 110 ft. round with three 40's; menagerie is 70 with three 30's, and sideshow 60 with two 30's. J. E. "Doc" Ogden, sideshow manager, is supervising the construction of his department. The No. 2 sideshow under direction of Raymond Daly will boost a novelty attraction. Grover McCabe, equestrian director, is expected to arrive the first of February and high school horses numbering 12 will be put through a course of training under his direction. Dog and pony trainers have been at work in quarters since the first of January. Four wild animal numbers will appear in the arena and there will be a great number of circus features. During the week a carload of baggage horses arrived from Missouri. Last of several shipments of parade and spec wardrobe is expected from New York manufacturers daily. This together with another assignment of animals for the menagerie will complete the assembling of the circus.

Although no doubt some new wardrobe was purchased in New York, based on the King interview, it would appear however that the bulk of the wardrobe came from the Ringling-Barnum quarters in Bridgeport.

The Feb. 14, 1925 *Billboard* said that the Maxwell Trio, comedy horizontal bar artists who had been with the Rogers and Harris Fraternal Circus for the past three years would be with Walter L. Main this season.

Two weeks later it was reported that L. C. Gillette had been signed as contracting agent. He had been with Sparks for 11 years and with the late J. A. Jones and Elmer H. Jones for 8 seasons. Clown alley would be directed by Arthur Borella, widely known joey, and equestrian director, Grover McCabe, had completed the program which promises to be one of the strongest ever offered by a circus of this size. Old time circus features such as leaps and several new ones, including two wild animal acts in the steel arena would be in the performance. Other notes appearing in the *Billboard* said that Ray Glaum was assisting McCabe with the spec and every week one to three wagons were being sent from the blacksmith and woodworking shops to the paint department. Tommy Poplin, electrician, is in charge of the building of a wagon to carry the electric light plants

which will be two 18 KW Westinghouse generators operated by two Dodge engines. Charles (Hookrope) Rodimer, boss hostler, is expected about March 10 at which time the baggage stock wintering at a farm ten miles from quarters will be brought in and conditioned for the road.

It is interesting to note that the number of wild animal acts planned for the steel arena had decreased from 4 to 2 in the latest report. Actually on opening day only one such act was presented.

In March the *Billboard* announced that Willie C. Clark and wife, foot jugglers, double trapeze, and flying ladder artists had been signed and that Ray Glaum would be featured in the spec doing a classical dance and also present his sensational teeth slide, iron-jaw, and swinging ladder number, plus working the come-in. Glaum worked in feminine attire and was often listed in the program reviews as "Miss".

By late March the staff of the Walter L. Main Circus was complete and was printed in the March 21, 1925 *Billboard* as follows:

King Bros., proprietors and managers; Louis Dobson, auditor; Harry Miller, supt. privilege car; L. C. Gillette, local contractor; Charles Hunter, special agent; Fred Wilson, contracting press agent; T. O. Newland, press agent back, also supt. reserve seats; J. C. Ogden, manager sideshow; Grover McCabe, equestrian director; John Parker, general supt; H. C. Payne, supt. privileges; John Griffin, musical director; John Jones, supt. canvas; H. C. (Whittie) Warren, trainmaster; Charles Rodimer, boss hostler; Bert Carroll, supt. commissary depart-

ment; Thomas Poplin, supt. lights; Ernest Johnson, supt. props; Ralph Hunter, supt. ring stock; Earl Greer, supt. stock; Mark Smith, supt. sideshow canvas; Pete Loftus, 24 hour agent; Al Bruner, supt. elephants; Joseph Cole, supt. animals; Sam Burgess, boss carpenter; Vic Peralta, boss painter; George Hubers, Sr., blacksmith; Al Clarkston, manager advertising car No. 1; Kid Hottendorf, checkerup; Frank Brad, announcer.

As had been the custom in the past Howard King served as general manager back on the show while Floyd King was in overall charge of the advance.

The March 28, 1925 *Billboard* in an article with headline

tour april 15. Large Street Parade to be one of Features, said that the season's tour would begin in Frankfort, Ky., April 15, with rehearsals held the 13th and 14th. Other notes said the electric light plant wagon had been turned out of the blacksmith shop last week, it being the last to be entirely constructed at quarters and corresponds to all baggage wagons with the show in regard to uniformity of tread with interchangeable wheels. The new Westinghouse and Dodge engines are now being installed by Thomas Poplin. One of the features that impresses quarters visitors has been the striking decorations of the dens, floats, and tableau wagons done under supervision of Vic Peralta. All parade wagons have old time massive carvings and gold leaf. The street parade is to be large and elaborate with four bands, two calliopes, and many riders wearing all new wardrobe. The train has the best of equipment. Draft horses have now been brought to quarters. A final note said the opening spec would be titled "Circus Days".

The color scheme of the train is not known to the author and so far no photos of it have turned up to give any clues. Baggage wagons appear to have been red and parade and cage wagons

**Photo No. 12 - Russia Tableau carrying No. 1 band in Walter L. Main street parade at Presque Isle, Maine, Aug. 11, 1925. This wagon was purchased by the Kings from Ringling-Barnum at Bridgeport. Pfening Collection.**



seem to be mostly red with some exceptions.

Throughout the season various reviewers would give "counts" as to the number of elephants and other lead stock, camels, zebras etc. which they observed on the Walter L. Main lot. All reports say the show began the season with a total of five elephants, which in all probability were the same five which according to Floyd King were on the Harris Bros. Circus in 1924. I asked CHS Chang Reynolds who has the finest elephant history files of anyone I know of to give me what he had on King brothers elephants in the period of 1919-30 and he graciously consented. Unfortunately he did not have a year by year exact listing by name and number of the elephants but did have considerable information on the King elephants.

The Kings were known to have at least 14 different elephants on their shows during these years, probably more. They seemed to have had bad luck with their elephants especially during the early years. The Kings didn't have an elephant in 1919 but in the summer of 1920 they purchased LITTLE HIP, so named because it had previously appeared with the New York Hippodrome. Floyd said at the time they brought the elephant it was only a baby. They bought it in Muskogee, Okla. and shipped it over into Arkansas where the Great Sanger Show was playing. Unfortunately LITTLE HIP died that winter and in 1921 the Kings had no elephant on their show. Floyd recalls it was rough on any circus not having an elephant on their and this was one of the primary reasons they made the deal with M. L. Clark in 1922 to use his animals including the elephant, MENA. Since the arrangement with Clark was only for the 1922 season, the Kings had to acquire another elephant in 1923. They purchased MOMS from the American Circus Corporation and had her on Rice Bros. Circus that season until she

died while the show was still on the road. MOMS had been one of the earliest Mugivan owned elephants. She arrived in the U.S. with the Hagenbeck Animal Show in 1905 and was sold to Mugivan's Howes Great London Circus in the winter of 1906. MOMS had then been with Mugivan shows until sold to the Kings. Actually the Kings had purchased another elephant earlier which was scheduled to go with Rice Bros. but she never was delivered. In the fall of 1922 they bought NELLIE LOCKHART but she became unruly on the truck near Tupelo, Miss. during transportation to the King quarters and broke away. During her flight she became mired in a swamp and died from exhaustion so she never travelled on the road with a King show. NELLIE LOCKHART was one of the famous Lockhart act on the Ringling show in the late 1890's and was sold to William P. Hall in 1917. She had been on several shows after that ending up on Gollmar Bros. in 1922.

When the Harris Bros. Circus was being readied for the road in 1924 no elephant was available, so the Kings went elephant buying again. We know for sure they bought DANNY and MAMA MARY (OLD MOM) from the American Circus Corporation. Also a strong possibility exists they got EVA from the corporation at the same time. DANNY, an Asiatic male, was imported as a baby by the American Circus Corporation in 1922 and assigned to Gollmar Bros. In 1923 he was on Sells-Floto, so far as we know DANNY was the only male elephant owned by

**Photo No. 13 - Russia Tableau with No. 1 band in Walter L. Main street parade in 1925. Wagon immediately in rear is presently "unidentified". It probably came from Baraboo or Bridgeport. Note: Photos 13-19 picture the 1925 parade in two different locations. One, possibly both, is believed to be Presque Isle, Maine, August 11, 1925. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.**



the Kings, the others all being Asiatic females. For 1924 we know the names of only three of the five elephants which according to Floyd King were on the Harris Bros. Circus. Around 1927 the Kings purchased from Ellis Joseph several elephants. The group coming from Joseph included VIC, TOPSY, TILLIE, JUDY, and SALLY. The possibility exists that perhaps some of the five mentioned got to the Kings earlier than 1927, maybe in time for the 1924 Harris Bros. but the latter is only speculation. In any event all accounts put the number of elephants which began the 1925 season with the Walter L. Main Circus at 5.

The 1925 circus season had arrived. Railroad shows (flat car type) going on the road included Ringling-Barnum, Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-W Bros., Lee Bros., Gentry-Patterson, Robbins Bros., Frank J. Taylor, and Walter L. Main. The new Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West was an important addition to the list of major shows on the road that season. Gilly-Tunnel type railers going out listed Cooper Bros., owned by Elmer H. Jones, and Chester Monahan's Gollmar Bros. Gollmar was converted to a 10 car, flat car type, railer, in late season 1925. Most overland shows were moving on a combination of wagons and motor trucks. Some of the overland shows were Mighty Haag, Mighty Hooze, Seils-Sterling, Ketrow Bros., M. L. Clark & Sons, Perry Bros., Orange Bros., Moon Bros., Sam Dock's Keystone State, Rose Killian, and Della O'Dell.

Both Ringling-Barnum and Al G. Barnes had dispensed with street parades earlier and the American Circus Corporation shows, Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, and John Robinson went out in 1925 giving no parades but after a month on the road the daily marches were resumed. The rest of the railers and most of the overland shows still featured the daily, grand free street parade.

The show opened April 15 in Frankfort, Ky. as scheduled and the April 25, 1925 *Billboard* covered the event with an article headed, "WALTER L. MAIN HAS FINE START. Season Ushered in at Frankfort, Ky. Fine Organization Assembled. Program Excellent. Parade Attractive." The show opened in ideal weather and had excellent business. Andrew Donaldson visited at the second stand at Winchester, Ky. and provided the detailed *Billboard* review of the show which read (in part) as follows.

"One of the largest shows ever assembled on a train of its size. Canvas is all new, as are the banners, seats, and lighting equipment. All property men, ushers, ticket men are in uniform. The parade with all wagons and cages handsomely painted and heavy in gold leaf is very attractive with four



**Photo No. 14 - Small Oval Tableau (Ringling No. 49) with No. 2 band pulled by four horse hitch in Walter L. Main street parade, season of 1925. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.**

bands, two calliopes, and at least 50 mounted riders, (Author's Note: If 'mounted riders' refer to people on horseback as would be assumed then this is obviously a typo error or exaggeration. Probably a dozen riders would be more correct) was met with considerable enthusiasm from probably the largest crowd that ever viewed a circus parade in Winchester. Ten double deck banners are in front of the sideshow which has half a dozen stages with freak curiosities, novelties, and Prof. Marshall and his 14 Georgia minstrels. Sideshow top is a 60 with two 30's. Across from the No. 1 sideshow was Ray Daley's Hawaiian Village with five native musicians and dancers. Tent is 20 x 40. On the midway are two regular outside candy stands and a 'hop scotch' under management of H. Payne.

"Legal adjusters of the show are Howard Y. Bary and W. H. Seymour. The menagerie is one of the most complete zoos for a show of this size with the cages handsomely decorated with gold leaf. In the big top are two rings, an elevated stage, steel arena, and hippodrome track. An outstanding feature of the performance is a popular renewal of the old time leaps with several leapers led by Fred Nelson and Grover McCabe performing double somersaults. The Maxwell Trio of horizontal bar artists, the DeLong

Sisters, acrobats, Tom and Betty Waters, tight wire artists, Viola Cornalia, Arthur Borella, F. W. White, head balancer, and Ray Glaum, all stood out conspicuously in the program.

"The 1925 Walter L. Main Program was as follows:

"Introductory spectacle and pageant participated in by nearly 200 people, horses, elephants, camels, and sacred oxen. The costuming and wardrobe of this huge number is scarcely equated by even some of the larger circuses. This was followed by a lion act in the steel arena, Peter Loftus, trainer. Afterwards came the following displays.

1. Rings 1 and 2, six horse Shetland pony drills worked by Fred Nelson and Lawrence Daley. On the stage, the Maxwell Trio.

2. Leaps participated in by all the

**Photo No. 15 - Large Oval Tableau (Ringling No. 4) with costumed performers atop is pulled by six horse hitch in Walter L. Main street parade, season of 1925. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.**



best athletes and gymnasts with the show.

3. Ring 1, Elephant number worked by Miss Nelson. Ring 2, Elephant number presented by Soldier Johnson. Stage, Educated goats trained and worked by Miss Smithwick.

4. Clown number headed by Arthur Borella with a dozen other joeys.

5. Swinging ladder number worked by Misses Glaum, McCabe, Cornalia, Whiteside, Zenero, and Hunter. 'June Night' was sung by Luella Beattie, prima donna.

6. Ring 1, Fisher Brothers, jugglers. Ring 2, W. C. Clark, foot juggler. Ring 3, Rube Dyer, tramp bicyclist and unicycle rider.

7. Clown number, Fireman's brigade.

8. Ring 1, Viola Cornalia in a novelty combination act presenting half a dozen features in her one number. Ring 2, Miss White, looping-the-loop on a trapeze. Stage, Frank Satiro, equilibrist.

9. Ring 1, Riding dogs and monkeys worked by L. Dailey. Ring 2, Riding dogs and monkeys presented by Fred Nelson. Stage, Trained white Spitz dogs introduced by Miss McCabe.

#### Concert Announcement

10. Ring 1, Perch act, Frank Satiro. Ring 2, Perch act, Robert Zenero. Stage, Perch act by W. W. and Miss White.

11. DeLong Sisters, acrobats, equilibrists, and contortionists, working above the stage.

12. Clown number.

13. Ring 1, Tommy and Betty Waters, tight wire dancers. Ring 2, Upton-Whiteside Trio, wire artists. Stage, E. W. White, head balancing act on trapeze.

14. Menage number on the track and rings. Song, 'At the End of the Road'. Following riders participated: Misses Beattie, Nelson, McCabe, Monroe, Zenero, Fred Nelson, and L. Daley.

15. Ring 1, W. C. Clark and Miss Clark, double trapeze act. Ring 2, The Zeneros, double trapeze act. Stage, E. W. White, head balancing act on trapeze.

16. Slide for life by Miss Glaum.

17. Ring 1, Miss Waters, iron jaw artiste. Ring 2, Miss McCabe, iron jaw. Stage, Miss Glaum, iron jaw.

18. Races, Shetland ponies with monkey riders; mule races with Rube Dyer and Ernest Skelton, riders; Jockey races, L. Daley and Harry Hunter; Roman Standing Races, Fred Nelson and Robert Wilson.

"The outstanding feature of the concert was an athletic congress of boxers and wrestlers under the direction of Bill Leon.

"Harry Lippman, for four years balloon man with the King brothers was working with three assistants and Sam Gottlieb, tintype man, was seen on the lot making his fifth year with the show. Frank Satiro, Japanese performer is in his seventh year with the

King brothers, joining when they organized their first circus."

No review nor listing of the sideshow attractions was given. The sideshow lineup as printed in the official 1925 route book had the following attractions: Ben Deb, fire eater; Abdella, sword walking; Madam Elizabeth, gift mind reader and second sight; Johnie Wilkes, pigmy cannibal; Miss Bessie Jason and Miss May Allie, Egyptian dance girls; Herbert Marshall, sideshow bandleader with ten piece band; Columba Ben Deb, flageolet player and Alexander Auriolio, drum. This particular listing of attractions was made after James Shropshire took over the sideshow late in the season and added some new acts and personalities.

Operating in the sideshow were several grift privileges such as nuts (shell game) and broads (three card monte) as well as the "blowoff" for Egyptian dance girls. (For an additional price the girls would retire to a sectioned off portion or small tent in back and put on a more "spirited" performance in scantier attire). Naturally the grift attractions were illegal in most (or all) of the towns played and their appearance depended on the "fix" of local authorities which usually wasn't too difficult.

Additional Kentucky stands at Beatyville and Hazard completed the first week of the season. The second week saw the show still in Kentucky playing Whitesburg, Jackson Irvin, Richmond, Corbin, and Lynch. During the third week the show played Kentucky dates at Harlan and Pikeville, then moved into Virginia for Norton and Tazell, and finished the week in West Virginia at Bluefield and Gary. The fourth and fifth week found the Walter L. Main show playing all stands in West Virginia.

Nothing appeared in *The Billboard* concerning the show until the May 23, 1925 issue which said that Walter L. Main, now in its fifth week, had encountered some very inclement weather so far in the season. In spite of almost incessant rain and cold weather, excepting the first ten days of the season, the show is moving along satisfactorily. At Bluefield, W. Va., May 1, a safety chain on a baggage wagon broke while descending a small mountain throwing the wagon on one of the pole horses and injuring it so badly it had to be killed. On the run from Sutton to Weston, W. Va. a 70 ft. stock car was derailed while rounding a curve. Had the car listed several inches further it would have gone down a mountain. Luckily the train was moving slowly at the time. The horses in the car were unloaded and the car placed on the rails within an hour and the train was again on its way.

Clay Court House, W. Va., May 11, will long be remembered. The show Sundayed there and arrived in a down-



**Photo No. 17 - Walter L. Main herd of five elephants in street parade, season of 1925. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.**

pour of rain. Not once during the two days did the rain cease. The lot which was a mile and a half from town was in a low spot which didn't help matters. An afternoon only performance was given under the most trying circumstances. Hauling to runs after the show was a real problem as several landsides had partially covered the road. As many as 20 horses and 2 elephants were necessary to handle some of the baggage wagons in getting them off the lot. The article continued mentioning that the only change in personnel since the opening was the replacement of Dan White, big show boss canvasman, by Jack Dempsey. (Same name as the prominent boxer of the day). The sideshow was doing good spring business. A word of praise was given the cookhouse under direction of Bert Carroll, who generally had the flag flying 40 minutes each morning after the kitchen wagon reaches the lot.

**Photo No. 16 - Two Statue Tableau with sideshow band is pulled by six horse hitch in Walter L. Main street parade, season of 1925. This wagon was purchased from Sparks Circus. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.**



At Bluefield, Williams, Grafton, and Elkins, W. Va. the show had good newspaper afternotices. At Elkins, W. Va., May 15, several oxen teams which had brought patrons 30 miles to see the show were observed. One of the hearty four ox team drivers, over 80 years old, saw his first elephant that day. A final note said the matinee crowd at Montgomery, W. Va., May 8, was far above expectations.

The route taken by Walter L. Main so far in the season was one that was popular with the Sparks Circus, John Robinson, and at times Sells-Floto and Hagenbeck-Wallace which played primarily in the larger cities. No mention was made in the *Billboard* accounts of opposition with other shows but there certainly must have been considerable. Even though a larger show might not play the particular town their billers would cover it just the same with paper calling attention to its stand nearby.

The 1925 season saw generally prosperous times throughout most of the country. The mid 1920's were good trouping years and although each season would see its share of circus failures, most of the shows on the road came home to the barn in the fall strong winners. Years later old troupers would look back on the seasons 1923-29 and proclaim them



**Photo No. 18 - Elephants, four camels, and steam calliope pulled by truck, bring up rear of Walter L. Main street parade, season of 1925. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.**

some of the best profitwise years for circuses in history.

Walter L. Main entered Maryland, May 18, at Oakland to begin the 6th week. It returned to West Virginia the next day at Keyser, then played Pennsylvania dates at Meyersdale and West Newton. The show then returned to West Virginia to finish out the week at Morgantown and Masontown. The first five stands of the 7th week were in West Virginia with final date of the week at St. Clarisville, Ohio, on Decoration Day, May 30.

The 8th week saw the show playing three stands in Ohio, one in West Virginia, and two in Pennsylvania. The 9th week began, June 8 at Brownsville, Pa. and the show remained in the Keystone State for 30 consecutive stands, finishing up the run at the conclusion of the 13th week, July 11, at Tawanda, Pa.

During this long period practically nothing appeared in the trade publications concerning the Walter L. Main show. The July 4, 1925 *Billboard* did say that the Whitesides which had been with the show had left and joined the Frank J. McIntyre Circus playing weekly stands.

The show moved into New York at Waverly, July 13, and spent the entire 14th and 15th weeks in that state. To begin the 16th week the show went into New England with first date coming at

Richford, Vt., July 27. It was followed by other Vermont stands at Newport and St. Johnsbury, then the show moved on into New Hampshire for Littleton and Groveton. The week ended with the show at South Paris, Maine, August 1. It then spent all of the next four weeks, 17th thru 20th, in Maine with last date coming at Biddeford, August 29.

An advertisement in the August 1, 1925 *Billboard* read as follows:

"WALTER L. MAIN CIRCUS WANTS. High Class Novelty Acts. Horizontal Bar and Family Act. Lady Menage Riders. Clowns. Jockey and Roman Standing Riders. Also Big Show Musicians. Best of accommodations and long season. Write or wire, Walter L. Main Circus as per route."

It is obvious there was considerable turnover in the performers and other

**Photo No. 19 - Steam calliope pulled by local dray truck brings up rear of Walter L. Main street parade in 1925. This calliope was formerly used by John Robinson Circus and purchased from the American Circus Corporation in Peru, Ind. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.**



personnel during the season but such was not uncommon in those days when performers especially on the smaller shows often moved about during the season. Other shows were also advertising continually for personnel. It was a mark of the good times shows were enjoying.

The August 8, 1925 *Billboard* said the Main show had been playing to satisfactory business in New England. In Vermont it had found business pretty good. It was now the high tide of the tourist season in that state as well as New Hampshire and Maine and the resort towns were filled with visitors, all potential circus customers. Ideal weather during the day had been the rule but at night overcoats were in demand which came as a relief from some of the heat waves recently experienced in Pennsylvania and New York State. The show Sundayed at Richford, Vt., July 27, and it was only a half mile from the lot to the Canadian border so many troupers took advantage and made a "hegira" to the oasis of good booze and quenched their thirst. At the time the U.S. was in the height of prohibition and good booze when found was terribly expensive. The lot at Richford was on the fairgrounds, a mile and a half from town, but it made no difference to the people who came to the show. It was a very profitable stand. At Saranac Lake, N.Y., July 22, a 116 mile run from Port Henry was made through the Adirondack Mountains over the D & H Railroad. The show was handled in two sections, both of which were in by 8 a.m. The day before in Port Henry the kiddies saw the red wagons for the first time in 8 years and result was two capacity houses in the W. L. Main big top. All along the route the menagerie was attracting much favorable comment. At Littleton, N. H., July 30, three zebras were added.

The August 29, 1925 *Billboard* gave a further report on the Walter L. Main lengthy tour of New England and said in headlines, WALTER L. MAIN PARADES IN U. S. AND CANADA AT CALAIS, ME. The article went on to say that when the show played Calais, Me., August 20, the street parade moved across the river into Canada at St. Stephen, N.B. and back due to the efforts of legal adjuster, Howard Y. Bary, without the usual perplexities of moving a circus into a foreign country. A big day's business came at Calais as well as at Eastport the following day. It was noted that a Walter L. Main Circus had made its first tour through Maine as a wagon show more than 40 years ago. The fourth week of the New England tour saw pleasant weather with enough chill in the air to keep the overcoats handy. Doc Ogden, sideshow manager, was forced at several stands to have a French interpreter tell the midway crowd of the wonders to be seen inside his show. A. C. Blage, the

steam calliope player, who earlier in the season had been stricken with malaria, rejoined the show at Presque Isle, Maine, August 11. His daily concerts came every evening before the sideshow opening. Additional notes in the article said that a new 30 ft. middle had been recently added to the sideshow making it now a four pole top, and the count of hay-eating animals in the menagerie under direction of Soldier Johnson was given as 5 elephants, 4 camels, 3 zebras, and a sacred cow.

The show moved into New Hampshire, August 31, to begin the 21st week, returned to Maine the next day at Springvale, then it was back into New Hampshire to finish out the week with dates at Walpboro, Laconia, Plymouth, and Woodsville. Two more dates in the state at Lebanon and Hillsboro came in the 22nd week and were followed by a single stand in Massachusetts at Athole, Sept. 9, and New York dates at Hoosick Falls, Saugerties, and Haverstraw.

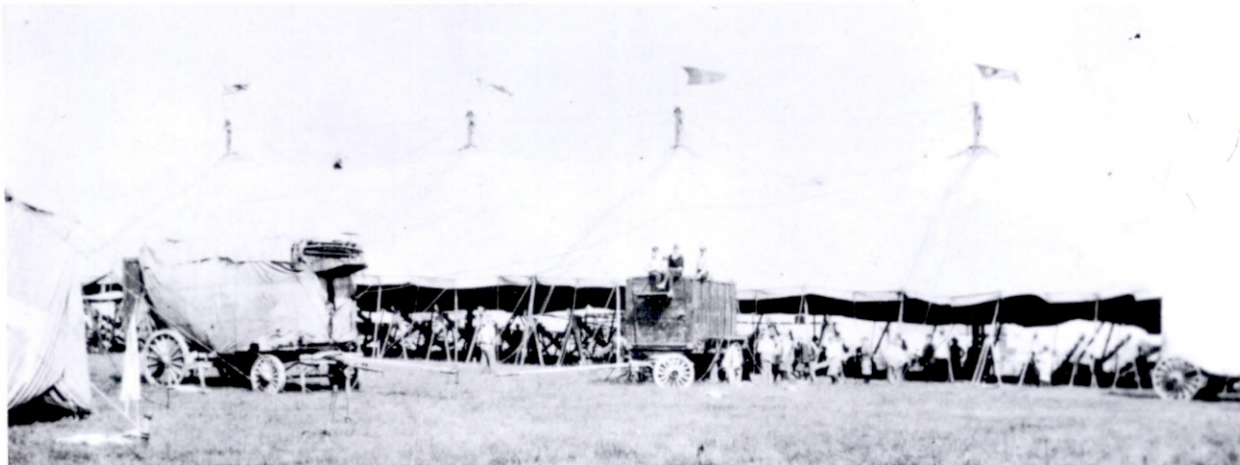
The Oct. 3, 1925 *Billboard* informed the circus world of recent Walter L. Main activities in an article headed, "WALTER L. MAIN CIRCUS NEW IN THE SOUTH. Walter L. Main and Andrew Downie Recent Visitors. Former Gentry-Patterson Employees Join." The article went on to say that the show had journeyed within the past fortnight from the White Mountains to the cotton fields of the south. Business had uniformly maintained a satisfactory average. Haverstraw, N.Y., Sept. 12, gave the show a big day's business. A woman there purchasing tickets for herself and daughter was overcome by the heat and excitement and death came before medical aid could be summoned. Walter L. Main joined at Saugerties, N.Y., Sept. 11, for several days' visit, and Andrew Downie enroute from New York City to his home in Medina, N.Y. was a visitor at the matinee that day. From Cape Charles, Va. to Port Norfolk, Va. the show's train was floated across the Chesapeake Bay on a Pennsylvania

Main territory. Downie had never routed the show on a tour of the deep South as King was now doing.

To begin the 26th week the show dipped into South Carolina to play Conway, Oct. 5, then returned to North Carolina the next day at Whitville, followed by three more South Carolina dates at Timmons ville, Bennettsville and Red Springs. Final stand of the 26th week was at Dunn, N.C., Oct. 10.

Beginning at Spring Hope, Oct. 12, the show played all of the 27th and 28th weeks plus two stands of the 29th week in North Carolina. Last date in the Tarheel State was at Lumberton, Oct. 27, the show moved into South Carolina for the rest of the week playing Marion, Lake City, Manning, and Walterboro.

In the meantime while Walter L. Main was gathering in good business in the Carolinas, other important developments concerning the Kings and their circus operations were taking place. Floyd in his interview said that while he was in Wilmington, N.C.



**Photo No. 21 - Walter L. Main big top during morning set up on lot, season of 1925. Canvas covered tableau and baggage wagons are in foreground. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.**

A long Sunday run of 201 miles took the show southward fast and the 23rd week began at Chestertown, Md., Sept. 14. By the end of the week it had moved down the Maryland-Delaware-Virginia peninsula and was at Cape Charles, Va., Sept. 19.

A tour of North Carolina which consumed all of the 24th and 25th weeks began at Ahoske, Sept. 21 with final stand coming at Wallace, Oct. 3.

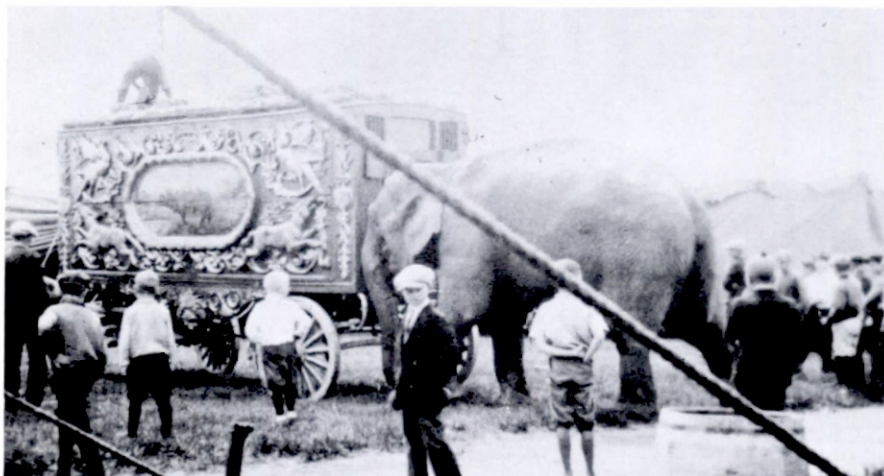
The show was still experiencing personnel turnover and advertised in the Sept. 19, 1925 *Billboard* as follows: "CIRCUS MUSICIANS WANTED. For Big Show Band, 2 clarinets and 1 trombone. Also for Colored Sideshow Band, clarinet and baritone. Long Season, Best of accommodations. Wire Walter L. Main Circus as per route."

A second advertisement appeared in the same issue, "CIRCUS BILL POSTERS WANTED. Country Route and Opposition Billers. Good salary. Long Season. Wire Al Clarkson, Manager, Advertising Car, Walter L. Main Circus. (route included)"

RDD Float. Most of the performers caught the morning passenger boat at 6 a.m. and spent the day in Norfolk. Ahoskie, first of the North Carolina stands, was dry and dusty and the show experienced one of the very few hot days of the season. Two capacity audiences caught the show that day.

Crops in the eastern section of North Carolina where the show was concentrating were the best in years and farmers were getting a good price for their cotton and tobacco. The show was now in territory which had not seen a Walter L. Main titled circus in many, many years. The Kings were determined to expand their territory whereas Andrew Downie, who had operated the Main title for the past 6 seasons, had been content to remain almost exclusively in traditional W. L.

in September on advance business for his show he was contacted by John Pluto of Baltimore, Md. who had a proposition for him and his brother. Pluto said that the Gentry Bros.-James Patterson Circus, a 15 car show, was operating over in Missouri and business was very poor and it looked like it would close anytime. Pluto advised that the Miami County Bank of Paola, Kansas actually owned the show outright as Patterson was indebted to the bank for \$90,000 and had no chance of bailing himself out. The bank had already sent out a folder listing the equipment of the show for sale and Pluto had a copy. He proposed that he and the Kings purchase the Gentry-Patterson show on a 50-50 basis and put it on the road in 1926. Floyd said he would discuss the matter with his brother and would get back with Pluto in a few days. Several days later the Gentry-Patterson show did fold at Conway, Ark. and went into quarters at Paola, Kansas. Floyd said he and Howard agreed to attempt to



**Photo No. 20 - Wolf and Birds Tableau (Ringling No. 51) being pushed by elephant on Walter L. Main lot, season of 1925. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.**

purchase the show in partnership with Pluto and that shortly thereafter he met Pluto in St. Louis and they went over to Paola to talk with the bank and look over the equipment.

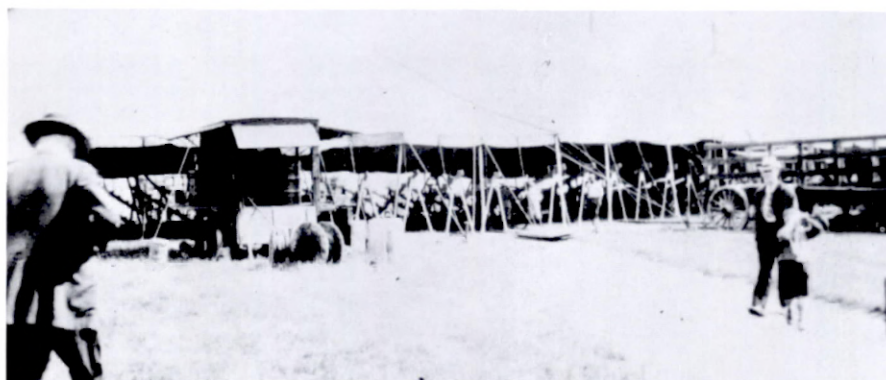
In mid-October 1925 the King brothers and John Pluto bought the Gentry-Patterson Circus from the Miami County Bank for \$40,000. Terms were \$25,000 cash and remaining \$15,000 to be paid on July 1, 1926. Arrangements were then made to secure the old Frank Fehr brewery property in Louisville for quarters to house both the newly purchased Gentry-Patterson 15 car show and the 10 car Walter L. Main Circus still on the road.

The King's new partner in the Gentry-Patterson deal, John Pluto, had been connected with the Cole Bros. Circus under the ownership of Martin Downs as a candy butcher back in the early 1900's. Later Pluto got into business for himself in Baltimore and accumulated quite a bit of money and wanted to get back into circus business, this time not as a candy butcher but as an owner. In mid-season 1924 he purchased the 15 car Golden Bros. Circus from Mike Golden but several weeks later while it was still on the road sold it to George W. Christy. Evidently the circus spirit still held him when he suggested to the Kings the Gentry-Patterson purchase.

Floyd King in his interview said that

before the Gentry-Patterson deal materialized he and his brother had discussed enlarging the Walter L. Main Circus. He said that although the show had been quite successful during the 1925 season they had been greatly handicapped especially in the fall by not having room for the workingmen to sleep in the cars. Only place for them was under the wagons on the flats or curled up inside one of the wagons. Consequently the turnover was great and they were constantly short of working men in the fall of the year when the cold rains would come. Floyd said his brother wanted to add one more car to take care of the workingmen while the show was still on the road but he reminded him that the rate to haul 11 cars would be the same as 15 and to wait until the season was over making the best of it and then they could talk of increasing the show to 15 cars in 1926. Of course the

**Photo No. 22 - Walter L. Main big top during morning set up on lot, season of 1925. Note in center foreground is the light plant wagon and at right, a seat wagon. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.**



purchase of the Gentry-Patterson show ended this speculation.

Shortly after the Gentry-Patterson show folded in September and before it was purchased by the Kings and Pluto a number of personnel from that show joined Walter L. Main enroute. Coming on were James Shropshire who took over as manager of the sideshow. He had served in that same capacity on Gentry-Patterson and brought with him to the Main show Ben Deb, fire act, La Pearl snake act, and G. Shannon, ticket seller. Others from the show joining Main were Deacon Albright, steam calliope player, E. E. Duenweg and three musicians for the big show band, Johnnie Wilkes, pigmy cannibal, and Eugene Gentry, sideshow musician.

Walter L. Main went into Georgia at Jesup, Nov. 2, to begin the 30th week with additional stands coming at Tifton, Camilla, Quitman, Cairo, and Donaldsonville. The Nov. 7, 1925 *Billboard* said the Main show in Georgia was doing satisfactory business. A number of shows, Christy Bros., Lee Bros., John Robinson, 101 Ranch, and Sparks had played in the state earlier but because of the bumper crop in the southern part of the state where the Main stands were there was still good pickins from the native's pockets. Northern Georgia had been severely hit by a drought in the late summer and early fall (old timers in Atlanta can recall that during that time they could walk across the Chattahoochee River so low was the water level) so the Walter L. Main show avoided that area entirely but many of the other shows hadn't and got a very slim take for their efforts. The article went on to say that although the Main show had missed the drought they had gotten some rain down through the Carolinas. It was announced that the show would close in Alabama shortly before Thanksgiving and that John Griffin, bandleader, would play "Get Your Rags On" for the last time then. James Shropshire, new sideshow manager, had been doing record business of late and Deacon Albright was playing the steam calliope in a concert each evening. The show had made a 133 mile jump from Manning to Walterboro, S. C., Oct. 31 and the ACL RR had made the run in record time. The parade went out a little late but doors for the afternoon show opened on time. It was the first show in Walterboro in five years and resulted in two big houses. It was also mentioned in this article for the first time that Soldier Johnson, supt. of elephants now, had a total of 6 elephants and 4 camels in the menagerie. The last count of elephants had been 5 so if this report is correct then the show would have added an elephant while enroute sometime within the last few weeks. The source and name of the elephant is not known to the author.

(Author's note: The mention of the late Deacon Albright playing the Walter L. Main steam calliope brings to mind some memories. The last time I ever talked to Deacon was in 1948 a day or so after the King Bros. Circus opened and he was playing a steam calliope for downtown bally and lot concerts each day. He very kindly showed me all of the mechanical details of the steamer and I recall that he told me, "You know, Floyd King, loves this old steam calliope better than the rest of the show combined". Indeed Floyd did love the piercing sounds of the old steamer which was true circus music to his ears. One of my fondest circus momentos is color movie film I took showing the 1954 King Bros. Circus street parade leaving the lot on opening day in Macon, Georgia. Walking briskly beside the steam calliope bringing up the rear was Floyd King. The player as per our pre-arrangement began pounding the keys as it came into view of my movie lens and I have preserved for posterity Floyd King and his beloved steam calliope on the way to downtown Macon.)

The Main show moved into Alabama at Abbeville, Nov. 9, for the first stand of the 31st week which was followed by dates in that state at Hartford and Florala. The show was scheduled to return to Georgia at Arlington, Nov. 12, but due to heavy rains the date was lost, but one final stand in Georgia was played the next day at Richland. Then it was back into Alabama at Hurtsboro for the last stand of the week. The 32nd and final week of the season saw all six stands in Alabama beginning with Opelika, Nov. 16, followed by Dadeville, Sylacauga, Columbiana, Talledega, and the closing date of the season coming at Piedmont, November 21.

In the meantime the Nov. 7, 1925 *Billboard* said that the Gentry Bros. Circus was now in new winterquarters in Louisville at 18th and Main streets. Equipment had been shipped by Missouri Pacific to St. Louis, then transferred to St. Louis Terminal RR to the Southern and then on to Louisville. The article said commodious winter quarters, formerly a brewery, were located here. Buildings contained blacksmith and paint shops, ring and animal barns, and stables. Ring stock were kept at quarters and draft horses were placed on a farm near New Albany, Ind. across the river.

The Nov. 28, 1925 *Billboard* told the story of the Walter L. Main closing noting the show's 47th Annual Tour had seen business on the whole satisfactory. At midnight after the closing at Piedmont, Ala. the show train was enroute 433 miles to Louisville quarters on the Southern RR. The run took 36 hours, stopping at Somerset, Ky., to feed and exercise the stock. While no turnaways were encountered during the season a consis-

(Season of 1925-1)  
ONE DAY ONLY  
**CLINTON FRIDAY OCT. 2**  
**WALTER L. MAIN**  
**CIRCUS**

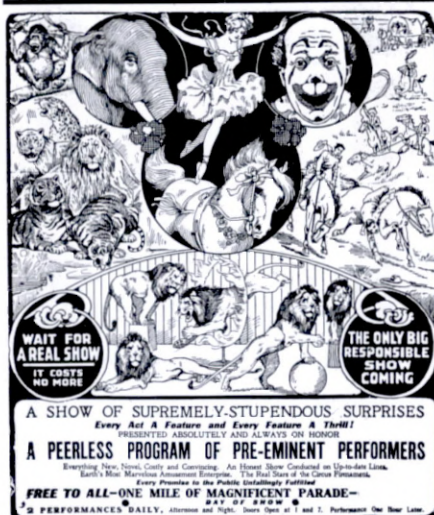


Photo No. 24 - Walter L. Main newspaper ad for stand at Clinton, N. C., Oct. 2, 1925. Joe Bradbury (Adams) Collection.

tant satisfying business was done. Only a few bloomers were played. The show was in 17 states, mileage totaled 11,036 over 31 different railroads. There were 190 show days, only one lost, Arlington, Ga., Nov. 12, due to lot being under water. Total performances lost were 7. The show was fortunate on its southern tour having very little rain along the Atlantic seaboard as well as in Georgia and Alabama. At the time shows playing Mississippi, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas and parts of Tennessee and Kentucky encountered many weeks of rain. The *Billboard* article mentioned that considering the size of the Main show a great deal of praise was given. The street parade excited a great deal of interest as well as the excellence of the show's equipment, and snappy, meritorious performance. The menagerie and stock also came in for favorable comment. More than half a million sheets of paper were used to advertise the show.

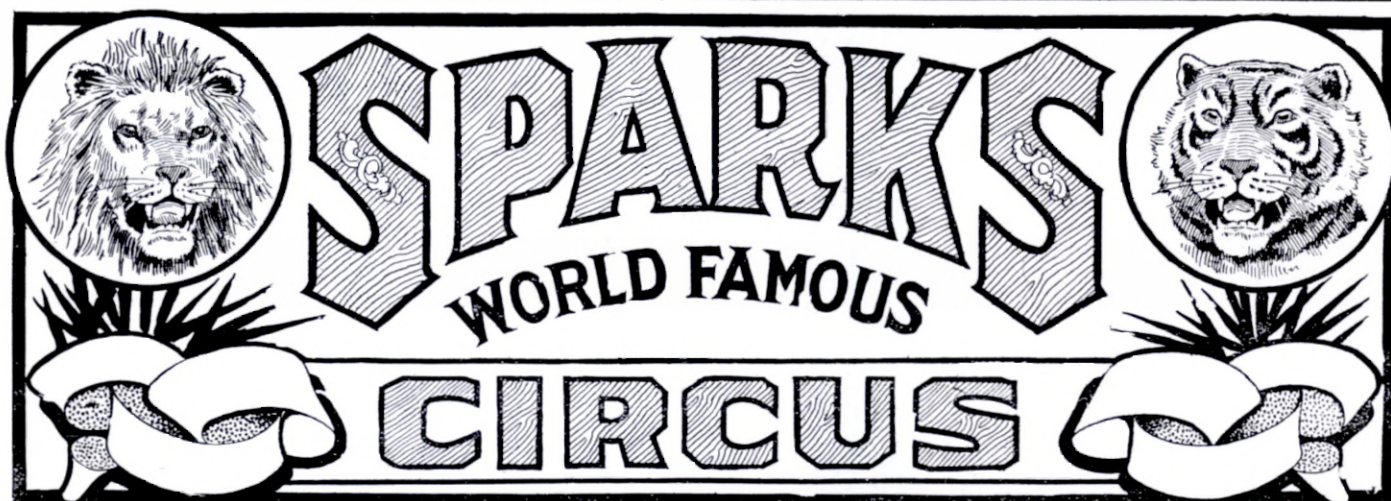
With the two circuses in Louisville quarters work during the winter of 1925-26 began early and during the month of December the trade publications kept the show world abreast of activities there. An early report said that Henry Kern had signed as bandmaster of Gentry Bros. for 1926 and the Dec. 12, 1925 *Billboard* said that the greater part of the Gentry Bros. equipment was being rebuilt at quarters and that the show's performance would be almost entirely new in 1926. The article mentioned that equipment work was being done under direc-

tion of Sam Burgess and M. G. Smith. Priority had been given to the parade wagons and soon as pieces were finished they went to the paint shop where Vic Peralta was in charge assisted by Yellow Burnett. Wink Weaver, domestic animal trainer for many years with Gentry Bros. was expected in quarters shortly before the holidays. Although no details were as yet given as to the size both shows would be in 1926 the *Billboard* did say that Walter L. Main would be on 15 cars. More notes said that two rings would be used in the training barn and that breaking and training of stock would begin January 1. Elephants would be broken into a new act by Bill Emery. Wardrobe department is under direction of Mrs. Harry J. McFarlan and Mrs. Yellow Burnett. All parade and entry wardrobe will be new next season. Final item said the Cottrell-Powell Troupe of riders had been signed to appear with Gentry Bros. in 1926.

In his interview Floyd King said that both the Gentry and Main rail cars were stored across the river from Louisville at the old army quartermaster installation near Jeffersonville, Indiana. He recalled there were thousands of feet of empty tracks which easily stored the cars. Actually the two circuses were scattered at three locations in the Louisville area in the winter of 1925-26, baggage stock on the farm near New Albany, Ind., the rail equipment at Jeffersonville, Ind. and the rest of the show at 18th and Main streets in Louisville.

The Dec. 26, 1925 *Billboard* had the following advertisement: "WALTER L. MAIN CIRCUS. Wants for Sideshow, Season 1926. Attractions of every description. Freaks, Curiosities and Novelty Acts. Midgets. Sword Swallower, Lady with Snake Act. Musical Act. Impalement Act. Bag punching act. Tatto Man, also Tatto Lady. Hawaiian and Egyptian Dancers. Flagelot player and Drummer. Ticket Sellers who are capable of making second opening. Want a real feature act, also Pin Heads and Aztecs. Colored Band Leader and Musicians and Minstrel talent, and Lady singers and dancers for same. Address James Shropshire, Manager Sideshow, Box 334, Maysville, Ky."

Thus 1925 came to a close. It had been a good season for the Kings who were quickly making their mark on the circus scene. Floyd said they cleared \$60,000 for the season. They were owners of a fully paid for 10 car show and half owners of a 15 car show, both scheduled to go on the road in 1926. The next installment will include a complete description of the properties of the Gentry-Patterson Circus the Kings and John Pluto purchased. Credits for the many individuals assisting the author in the research and illustration of this article will be acknowledged at the conclusion of the final installment.



## The Sparks Circus - through 1928

by Gordon M. Carver

### Season of 1914

The first information about the show for the 1914 season appeared in the February 7 *Billboard*. It said that the program was set and listed most of the performers who were to appear in the show. As in the previous year, the performance was to be given in two rings and a center stage. Announcement that four new cages of animals would be added was also made, although we know that this could not mean vehicles, only the bodies to fill them. The same interpretation must be made of the statement that 18 head of horses had just been added which was said to bring the total up to 65, exclusive of ponies and ring stock. This stock together with ponies, ring stock and elephants would have required

more space than was available in the three 60 foot stock cars the show then had. A 60 foot stock car would normally hold about 27 or 28 horses, or three times that number of ponies, or about 10 full sized elephants. The 65 head probably included both draft and ring horses and possibly the ponies. It is doubtful that the show had more than 40 or 44 head of draft horses.

Shortly thereafter came the announcement that a new advance car had arrived in winter quarters. The former advance car had been converted to a sleeping car to be used back on the show, giving them three 76 foot

**Side show opening on the Sparks Circus in 1915. Menagerie and big tops are visible at the rear of the main entrance.**

pullmans. This made the show now an 11 car show - one advance, three coaches, three 60 foot stocks and four 60 foot flats.

The new advance car left winter quarters on Friday, March 27, for Concord, N.C., the opening stand. The advance car was managed by James Randolph, starting his second year in that capacity. He had a Boss Billposter with fourteen billposters working for him. Also on the car was a Press Agent, a Programmer, a Pastemaker and a Chef for the men ate all their meals on the car. While it was announced that the show would play Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine for the first time in two years it will be seen from the route that the farthest into the northeast the show got was West Virginia and Ohio, not even making it into Pennsylvania.

In the meantime in Salisbury winter quarters activity was preparing the show for the road. The Dining Dept., was to have two new wagons and a water cart, this latter we presume to be a two wheel affair. In many of the small towns the show played getting water at or near the lot was often a problem, but a full sized four wheel water wagon was probably neither necessary or practical from a size and space standpoint. However, this conclusion is pure guess work.

Other winter quarter activity had Fritz Brunner breaking a kangaroo to do a boxing act for the aftershow to supplement the lion act he had had for the last several years. Much was also made of new animals being added to the menagerie and at one point it was said in the *Billboard* that there would be fourteen cages in the menagerie. In actuality the show had only one or two





The Two Indian tab was used as the lead bandwagon in the 1914 Sparks parade. There appears to be nine musicians, about half of the show's band.

11½ foot cages and three cross cages at this time. Another milestone for the show was passed in February when Clifton Sparks, the youngest circus treasurer, had his 21st birthday. Incidentally, this was a youthful show for John Sparks, Jr., Clifton's younger brother, at 19 was to be the 24 hour man. Charles Sparks, himself, was only 36.

The parade that this still small show was able to put out was rather surprising. There were four quite ornate tableau wagons (Two Indians, Grecian Statue, Sea Serpent and Dragons and mirrors wagons), a steam calliope, three cross cages and one or two full size cages. These wagons plus two or three mounted groups of two of four horses, two camels and five elephants was a fairly appealing spectacle for the mostly very small towns the show played. In this connection, it is interesting that 60 years or more later a number of the towns the show played in the Mississippi River delta country and the deep south are no longer in existence, at least as identifiable communities.

It should also be mentioned here that it is believed that this was the second year on the show of all the tab wagons mentioned above except possibly the "Grecian Statue" wagon. This latter wagon may have just arrived although we cannot be sure. The steam calliope was a new one this year. The "Gentry" style calliope that the show had had since 1911 was sold and this new one which would remain on the Sparks show as long as Sparks owned it replaced it.

In the April 4 *Billboard* they were still advertising for help. They needed cooch dancers for the side show, big show musicians, drivers, seatmen and workingmen in all departments.

Whether they got all the help they needed or not they opened at Concord, N.C., on Saturday, April 11 to good attendance. At the next stand, Monday, in Charlotte they had capacity at both performances, but the next day in their hometown of Salisbury the parade was canceled and attendance was poor because of heavy rains. The side show, so far doing satisfactory business, was managed by Cal Towers who had Cleo, snake charmer; Mlle. Latura and Madame Verda, mind readers; Madame Verda as Verda Wren also did a bag punching act; and Fred Martin did comedy juggling. Wright's Colored Minstrels provided the musical entertainment as well as more music for the parade; and the *Billboard* advertisement had apparently been successful for there was a group of Oriental Dancing (cooch) Girls. We can assume that

Fritz Brunner was the menagerie superintendent on the Sparks show for many years. Brunner worked two lions in a lightweight arena as a feature in the concert or aftershow. All photos are from the author's collection unless otherwise noted.



The Grecian Statue tab wagon is shown in a 1914 parade in Wilmington, Ohio.

those that paid their ten cents to get in were satisfied with the six acts.

The big show was given in about the same sized tent as in recent previous years, about a 100 foot round with three 40 foot middle pieces. However, a new dimension was added. Instead of the show having just one center ring, the show was given on a center stage and two end rings.

The program opened with the usual "Spec". Under the supervision of Bert Mayo, Equestrian Director it ran as follows.

1. Grand introductory pageant
2. Bicycle riding by the two Reynards
3. Mule hurdle; Young & Marsh, comedy acrobats; Mule hurdles
4. High school horses by Lizzie Bartlett, Myrtle Mayo and Bert Mayo
5. Swinging perch, Miss Iva Anders; Rolling globe, Dollie LaTow; Hand balancing, Barney James; Swinging perch, Toya Ashimira
6. Ladies principal riding by Flora Bedini, Olga Reed



7. Hand to hand equilibrists, O'Neill and Janelle
8. Sparks herds of pantomime baseball elephants, Louis Reed, Lizzie Bartlett
9. Aerial teeth act, the two Ashimiras; Balancing trapeze, Emma LaTow
10. Educated horses, Prof. Conners, Prof. Mayo
11. Comedy bar act, Guice troupe
12. A day at the county fair by Bert Mayo and Doc Grant
13. Invisible wire act, Orton troupe
14. Capt. Tiebor and his trained seals
15. Double jockey bareback acts, Walter Guice and Flora Bedini, Bert Mayo and Olga Reed
16. Roman rings, the Two DeVeras; Hoop rolling, Harry Mick; Slack wire, Emma LaTow
17. Single trapeze, LaBelle Lizette; Swinging ladder, Josie Ortano; Flying trapeze, May Ortans
18. Bucking mule and the spinning pony on the revolving table

While there were only four clowns on the roster, Jack Phillips had a big band of fourteen pieces. Fritz Brunner, Supt., of the menagerie, had both his two trained lions and the boxing kangaroos as the feature of the aftershow. Albert Keller who was in charge of concessions had six men selling peanuts and other goodies in the seats before and during the show. It is also interesting when we compare the performance of those of today's shows of comparable size that out of eighteen numbers only five of them were singles. All the rest either occupied both rings or the two rings and center stage.

Most of the staff and bosses had been with the show previously. While C. B. Fredericks, Legal Adjustor, and Lester Veal, Auditor, were new, T. W. Ballenger was still the General Agent handling most of the routing and advance contracting. Fletcher Smith also continued as Press Representative. Also returning were James Jacobs in charge of stock, Tom Jacobs handling

**Jack Phillips and his band on the center stage in the big top. Charlie E. Duble, who wrote for the *Bandwagon* in the 1940's, played first trombone in this band. The eight high star back grandstand is in the background. The tent has a 50 ft. center middle piece. Pfening Collection.**

the unloading and loading of the train, as well as Jim Caskey responsible for getting the tents up and down. New on the big show props was Joe Kelley and one job which for some reason seemed to have a high turnover rate, Supt., Lights, was handled at the start of the season by Ed Massey. However, he did not last out the season for by Mid-June the show was advertising for a head Chandelier Man "who understands Bolte & Weyer lights. Must join quick." The Bolte & Weyer lights, incidentally, were the most widely used of the gas lights that circuses had available before the advent of electric lights.

The season as a whole was successful. Three evening performances were lost, all in June. The first two were on June 4 and 5 at Strawberry Point and Pottsville, both in Iowa, due to high winds. The last was at Redwood Falls, Minnesota. Here the show was hit by a tornado or strong wind about half way through the afternoon performance.

About 600 people were in the big top at the time and the big top was flattened and destroyed but there were no serious injuries. The dressing top was also destroyed but the side show and menagerie tops escaped with only minor damage. Fortunately the show had a new big top on order and were able to obtain delivery of it two days later at Tyler, Minnesota. In the meantime, at Springfield, Minnesota, the show was given in a sidewalled arena.

The route as will be seen elsewhere took the show into the Virginias and then the mid-west where they spent four months in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas and Iowa. After this they returned through the Virginias into the Carolinas where they spent the last

seven weeks closing November 2 at Seneca, South Carolina. It is estimated that the total take for the season was about \$200,000. The largest single expense of running the show, aside from salaries was the railroad transportation fees which it is estimated were about \$45,000.

## Route Season 1914

### April

11. Concord, N.C.
13. Charlette, N.C.; Salisbury, N.C.;
15. High Point, N.C.; 16. Reesville, N.C.;
17. Danville, Va.; 18. South Boston, Va.
20. Roxboro, N.C.; 21. Bedford City, Va.;
22. Roanoke, Va.; 23. Princeton, W. V.;
24. Lester, W.V.; 25. Glen Jean, W.V.;
27. Beckley, W.V.; 28. Quinamont, W.V.;
29. Hinton, W.V.; 30. Covington, Va.

### May

1. Ronceverte, W.V.; 2. Marlinton, W.V.
4. Durbin, W.V.; Hendricks, W.V.; 6. Belington, W.V.; 7. Buckhannon, W.V.;
8. Weston, W.V.; 9. Richwood, W.V.
11. Mannington, W.V.; 12. Barnesville, O.; Bellaire, O.; 14. Steubenville, O.;
15. Cadiz, O.; 16. Millersburg, O.
18. London, O.; 19. Urbana, O.; 20. Versailles, O.; 21. Paulding, O.; 22. Bryan, O.; 23. Angola, Ind.
25. Goshen, Ind.; 26. Michigan City, Ind.;
27. Hammond, Ind.; 28. Sandwich, Ill.;
29. Princeton, Ill.; 30. Oregon, Ill.

### June

1. Sterling, Ill.; 2. Maquoketa, Ia.; 3. Monticello, Ia.; 4. Strawberry Point, Ia.;
5. Cresco, Ia.; 6. Pottsville, Ia.
8. Decorah, Ia.; 9. West Union, Ia.; 10. Vinton, Ia.; 11. Greene, Ia.; 12. North Wood, Ia.;
13. Forest City, Ia.
15. Estherville, Ia.; 16. Worthington, Minn.;
17. Slayton, Minn.; 18. St. James, Minn.;
19. Winthrop, Minn.; 20. Madison, Minn.
22. Camby, Minn.; 23. Redwood Falls, Minn.;
24. Springfield, Minn.; 25. Tyler, Minn.;
26. Lake Preston, S.D.; 27. Elen-dale, N.D.
29. Webster, S.D.; 30. Wheaton, S.D.

### July

1. Hector, Minn.; 2. Glencoe, Minn.; 3. Montevideo, Minn.; 4. Sisseton, Minn.
6. Twin Valley, Minn.; 7. Redlake Falls, Minn.;
8. Crookston, Minn.; 9. Hallock, Minn.;
10. Warren, Minn.;
11. Hatton, Minn.
13. Munich, N.D.; 14. Lakota, N.D.;
15. Rolla, N.D.; 16. Aneta, N.D.;
17. Hope, N.D.;
18. New Rockford, N.D.
20. Wapeton, N.D.; 21. Morris, Minn.;
22. Payneville, Minn.;
23. Buffalo, Minn.;
24. St. Croix Falls, Wis.;
25. Barron, Wis.
27. Ladysmith, Wis.;
28. Phillips, Wis.;
29. Medford, Wis.;
30. Stanley, Wis.;
31. Wantoma, Wis.

### August

1. Wittenburg, Wis.
3. Crandon, Wis.;
4. Iron River, Mich.;
5. Gillette, Wis.;
6. Shawano, Wis.;
7. Oconto, Wis.;
8. Kiel, Wis.

10. Oconomowac, Wis.; 11. Hartford, Wis.; 12. Beaver Dam, Wis.; 13. Sparta, Wis.; 14. Spring Valley, Minn.; 15. Lansing, Ia.

17. Oelwein, Ia.; 18. Osage, Ia.; 19. New Hampton, Ia.; 20. Boscobel, Wis.; 21. Whitewater, Wis.; 22. Delevan, Wis.; 24. Rochelle, Ill.; 25. Mendota, Ill.; 26. Minonk, Ill.; 27. Chatsworth, Ill.; 28. Watseka, Ill.; 29. Goodland, Ind.; 31. Hartford City, Ind.

#### September

1. Eaton, O.; 2. Wilmington, O.; 3. Circleville, O.; 4. Ironton, O.

7. Bluefield, W.V.; 8. Pulaski, Va.; 9. Christiansburg, Va.; 10. Rocky Mount, Va.; 11. Martinsville, Va.; 12. Madison, N.C.

14. N. Wilkesboro, N.C.; 15. Elkins, N.C.; 16. Mt. Airy, N.C.; 17. Greensboro, N.C.; 18. Asheboro, N.C.; 19. Lexington, N.C.

21. Albemarle, N.C.; 22. Mooresville, N.C.; 23. Statesville, N.C.; 24. Morganton, N.C.; 25. Hickory, N.C.; 26. Lenoir, N.C.

28. Lincolnton, N.C.; 29. Rutherfordton, N.C.; 30. Shelby, N.C.

#### October

1. Monroe, N.C.; 2. Wadesboro, N.C.; 3. Laurensburg, N.C.

5. Wilmington, N.C.; 6. Wallace, N.C.; 7. Clinton, N.C.; 8. Smithfield, N.C.; 9. Springfield, N.C.; 10. Robersonville, N.C.

12. Cheskie, N.C.; 13. Scotland Neck, N.C.; 14. Enfield, N.C.; 15. Fremont, N.C.; 16. Mt. Olive, N.C.; 17. Dunn, N.C.

19. Fairmont, N.C.; 20. Dillon, S.C.; 21. Bennettsville, S.C.; 22. Hartsville, S.C.; 23. Sumter, S.C.; 24. Kershaw, S.C.

26. Lancaster, S.C.; 27. Rock Hill, S.C.; 28. Goffney, S.C.; 29. Union, S.C.; 30. Greer, S.C.; 31. Easley, S.C.

#### November

2. Seneca, S.C. Season Ends.

#### Season of 1915

The year opened with the announcement that a new and larger pole wagon had been built in winter quarters. It was also noted that two new cages had been built. We don't know, however, whether these cages were actually new or merely rebuilds. It was not unusual for shows to call a rebuild new. In either event it is quite likely that the cage inventory was not increased by more than one. We say this in spite of the fact that the train was increased by the addition of one flat making the new total five. They were now going on the road with twelve cars including one advance, three coaches and three stocks.

The increase of the show to twelve cars put it on the borderline of the medium sized class. Certainly it was moving up. The *Billboard* took notice of this by publishing in the January 30 issue a photo of Charles Sparks with the caption, "He has made the show what it is today advancing from a two car to a twelve car outfit". Since the *Billboard* did not often take note of



This billboard was used for the Oct. 12, 1916 stand at Thomson, Ga. The large poster on the left is the same design as the litho shown on the cover of this issue. Pfening Collection.

showmen, at least small ones, in this way, this was considerable recognition.

Mention in winter quarter notes was also made of two new wagons being under construction, one to replace an older one and one additional one for the commissary or cookhouse department. The dining tent fed about 195 people with a cookhouse staff of 20. The dining top was 60 by 30 feet. The cook tent was 20 by 30 feet.

Fritz Brunner had four lions working daily in preparation for his usual act. This was to be his sixth year with a wild animal act but now preparing to be part of the main show rather than in the after show as formerly. However, before the season started two of his lions died so that the act was reduced to two animals, the same number he had been using in prior years and he was again in the after show. Nevertheless, his act was a strong drawing card and the show continued to report that "people stayed in droves to see his lion act in the concert" during the season.

The show opened Monday, April 12 in the winter quarters town of Salisbury, North Carolina. The parade was led by Jack Phillips band in bright new uniforms of red with black trim riding on a big tab wagon of red with gold carvings and yellow wheels and under gear. Early reports listed the band as having eighteen men; Jack Phillips, leader, with four cornets, four clarinets, two horns, three trombones, one baritone, one bass and two drums. Later in the season when their picture was taken, as will be seen elsewhere, they were down to fifteen men. For the parade the band was actually split in two, the second half riding in another tab wagon later in the parade. The only thing missing from the parade were the two camels which had been left in quarters because of threats of hoof and

mouth disease in parts of the route.

The program on opening day started as usual with the Grand Entry including the entire company in the two rings and elevated stage. The followed with:

1. Stage - Trick and fancy bicycle riding by the Reynards.
2. Ring 1 - Hurdle mule ridden by Myron Orton; Stage - Young Marsh Trio, comedy acrobats; Ring 2 - Hurdle mule ridden by Lyle Connors.
3. Ring 1 - High school horse ridden by Miss Myrtle Mayo; Ring 2 - High school horse ridden by Miss Lizzie Bartlett.
4. Ring 1 - Flying perch, Ashima; Stage - Fyling rings, O'Neill and Janelle; Ring 2 - Swinging ladder, Miss McLain.
5. Ring 1 - Principal bareback riding, Miss Flora Bedini; Ring 2 - Principal bareback riding, Walter Guice.
6. Stage - O'Neill and Janelle in feats of strength.
7. Ring 1 - Elephants trained by Lewis Reed; Ring 2 - Elephants performed by Miss Lizzie Bartlett.
8. Ring 1 - The McLains, aerialists; Ring 2 - Fisher Sisters, human butterflies.
9. Ring 1 - Stallions trained by Bert Mayo; Ring 2 - Stallions performed by Lyle Connors.
10. Stage - Guice trio on horizontal bars.
11. Stage - Capt. Tiebor and his trained seals and sea lions.
12. Stage - The Orton Family, wire walkers and acrobats.
13. Ring 1 - Bert Mayo, jockey bareback riding; Ring 2 - Walter Guice and Flora Bedini, jockey bareback riding.
14. Ring 1 - Miss McLain on the wire; Stage - Harry Mick, hoop roller and juggler; Ring 2 - Omenas, roman rings.
15. Ring 1 - Pony on the revolving table; Ring 2 - Unrideable mule.

There were again four clowns working the show, Henry Merkle, Doc Grant, Rube Walters, and Harry Mick, mostly doing fill-in bits between the acts. There were a total of 32 people with trunks in the dressing room top, eleven ladies and twenty-one men.

An interesting note about the five elephants owned by Sparks appeared in the August 7 *Billboard*. They had been weighed and big Mary, Sparks first elephant obtained about twelve years before as a young punk not more than five years old, weighed in at a very healthy 7,500 pounds. She was extremely large for her age and showed signs of becoming one of circusdom's largest pachyderms. The others were Queenie at 5150, Topsy at 5100 and the two babies, Ollie at 2130 and Mutt at 1980. As indicated above Mary, the leader of the herd, had she lived out a normal life span would probably have been one of the all time big ones. However, as we shall see, in 1916 her life was terminated.

The 1915 route was essentially the same as in 1914. Again the show went north into the Virginias and then through Ohio, Indiana and Illinois into Iowa, Minnesota and the Dakotas. Then they returned through Minnesota into Wisconsin and Illinois and then into Tennessee and Kentucky followed by the Carolinas finally ending the season in Georgia at Cochran December 6. It was a long eight month tour during which they traveled 13,601 miles.

The season as a whole was highly successful. There were no serious accidents and only a couple of minor changes in the performance. Two towns, McHenry, and Palatine, Illinois, scheduled for Friday and Saturday August 27 and 28 were cancelled as a precaution because of threatened hoof and mouth disease, but the loss was partly made up by playing

One of the Sparks three 11½ foot cages on the show in 1917. This wagon was sold to the King Bros. for the Walter L. Main Circus. The side boards were not removed for the parade.



McHenry on Sunday the 29th. While it seems impossible, there was only one reported late arrival during the season and this was not a really bad one. This also happened in August on the 18th at New London, Wisconsin, where the first wagon did not come off the flats until 8 a.m. In spite of this the parade was on its way downtown by 10:30, on time.

And so again Sparks Circus had had a successful but relatively uneventful season presaging bigger and better things to come in 1916.

#### Route Season 1915

##### April

12. Salisbury, N.C.; 13. High Point, N.C.; 14. Reidsville, N.C.; 15. Danville, Va.; 16. Altavista, Va.; 17. Salem, Va.; 19. Princeton, W.Va.; 20. Oak Hill, W.Va.; 21. Mt. Hope, W.Va.; 22. Beckley, W.Va.; 23. Hinton, W.Va.; 24. Marlinton, W.Va.

26. Elkins, W.Va.; 27. Davis, W.Va.; 28. Piedmont, W.Va.; 29. Grafton, W.Va.; 30. Weston, W.Va.

##### May

1. Richwood, W.Va.; 3. Buckhannon, W.Va.; 4. Pennsboro, W.Va.; 5. McConnellsville, Ohio; 6. Shelby, Ohio; 7. Marysville, Ohio; 8. Greenville, Ohio.

10. New Castle, Ind.; 11. Bluffton, Ind.; 12. Frankfort, Ind.; 13. Rensselaer, Ind.; 14. Attica, Ind.; 15. Sullivan, Ill.

17. Clinton, Ill. 18. Toluca, Ill.; 19. Chillicothe, Ill.; 20. Wyoming, Ill.; 21. Washington, Iowa; 22. Newton, Iowa.

24. Iowa City, Iowa; 25. What Cheer, Iowa; 26. Ames, Iowa; 27. Bancroft, Iowa; 28. Fairmont, Minn.; 29. St. Peter, Minn.

31. Rock Rapids, Iowa.

##### June

1. Lemars, Iowa; 2. Windom, Minn.; 3. Winnebago, Minn.; 4. Jackson, Minn.; 5. Flandreau, S. Dak.

7. Brookings, S. Dak.; 8. Tracey, Minn.; 9. Marshall, Minn.; 10. New Ulm, Minn.; 11. Fairfax, Minn.; 12. Dawson, Minn.

14. Granite Falls, Minn.; 15. Cokato, Minn.; 16. Hutchinson, Minn.; 17. Cam-

bridge, Minn.; 18. Sauk Centre, Minn.; 19. Aitkin, Minn.

21. Brainerd, Minn.; 22. Little Falls, Minn.; 23. Perham, Minn.; 24. Lisbon, N. Dak.; 25. Oakes, N. Dak.; 26. Lamoure, N. Dak.

28. Valley City, N. Dak.; 29. Wimbeldon, N. Dak.; 30. Harvey, N. Dak.

##### July

1. Velva, N. Dak.; 2. Bowbells, N. Dak.; 3. Ambrose, N. Dak.

5. Minot, N. Dak.; 6. Willow City, N. Dak.; 7. Rolla, N. Dak.; 8. North Wood, N. Dak.; 9. Park River, N. Dak.; 10. Hillsboro, N. Dak.

12. Roseau, Minn.; 13. Argyle, Minn.; 14. Ada, Minn.; 15. Herman, Minn.; 16. Benson, Minn.; 14. Mora, Minn.

19. Anoka, Minn.; 20. Rush City, Minn.; 21. White Bear Lake, Minn.

22. Amery, Wis.; 23. Rice Lake, Wis.; 24. Hayward, Wis.

26. Cumberland, Wis.; 27. Ellsworth, Wis.; 28. Menomonie, Wis.; 29. Mondovi, Wis.; 30. Neilsville, Wis.; 31. Arcadia, Wis.

##### August

2. Viroqua, Wis.; 3. Preston, Minn.; 4. Tomah, Wis.; 5. Markesan, Wis.; 6. Berlin, Wis.; 7. Maysville, Wis.; 9. Richland Centre, Wis.; 10. Mauston, Wis.; 11. Westfield, Wis.

12. Plainfield, Wis.; 13. Waupaca, Wis.; 14. Seymour, Wis.

16. Sturgeon Bay, Wis.; 17. Algoma, Wis.; 18. New London, Wis.; 19. Oconto Falls, Wis.; 20. Chilton, Wis.

21. Burlington, Wis.; 23. Darlington, Wis.; 24. Broadhead, Wis.; 25. Ft. Atkinson, Wis.

26. Lake Geneva, Wis.; 27. McHenry, Ill.; 28. Palatine, Ill.; 30. Harvey, Ill.

31. Gilman, Ill.

##### September

1. Paxton, Ill.; 2. Tuscola, Ill.; 3. Mt. Vernon, Ill.; 4. Nashville, Ill.

6. Marion, Ill.; 7. Metropolis, Ill.; 8. Mayfield, Ky.; 9. Greenfield, Tenn.; 10. Milan, Tenn.; 11. Paris, Tenn.

13. Clarksville, Tenn.; 14. Russellville, Ky.; 15. Glasgow, Ky.; 16.

Two Bactrian camels pulling a small cross cage in a 1916 Sparks parade.





Springfield, Tenn.; 17. Pulaski, Tenn.; 18. Lawrenceburg, Tenn.

20. Columbia, Tenn.; 21. Lewisburg, Tenn.; 22. Fayetteville, Tenn.; 23. McMinnville, Tenn.; 24. Sparta, Tenn.; 25. Shelbyville, Tenn.

27. Murfreesboro, Tenn.; 28. Lebanon, Tenn.; 29. Carthage, Tenn.; 30. Cookeville, Tenn.

#### October

1. Harriman, Tenn.; 2. Morristown, Tenn.

4. Newport, Tenn.; 5. Waynesville, N.C.; 6. Hendersonville, N. C.; 7. Asheville, N.C.; 8. Morganton, N.C.; 9. Statesville, N.C.

11. Elkin, N.C.; 12. Mt. Airy, N.C.; 13. Ashboro, N.C.; 14. Mt. Gilead, N.C.; 15. Carthage, N.C.; 16. Aberdeen, N.C.

18. Wadesboro, N.C.; 19. Maxton, N.C.; 20. Lumberton, N.C.; 21. Rockingham, N.C.; 22. Pittsboro, N.C.; 23. Louisburg, N.C.

25. Warrenton, N.C.; 26. Boykins, Va.; 27. Kelford, N.C.; 28. Ahoskie, N.C.; 29. Williamston, N.C.; 30. Greenville, N.C.

#### November

1. Tarboro, N.C.; 2. Enfield, N.C.; 3. Rocky Mount, N.C.; 4. Benson, N.C.; 5. Kenly, N.C.; 6. Mt. Olive, N.C.

8. Warsaw, N.C.; 9. Burgaw, N.C.; 10. Whiteville, N.C.; 11. Conway, S.C.; 12. Mt. Tabor, N.C.; 13. Rowland, N.C.

15. Clio, S.C.; 16. Mullins, S.C.; 17. Georgetown, S.C.; 18. Lake City, S.C.; 19. Hartsville, S.C.; 20. Bishopville, S.C.

22. Darlington, S.C.; 23. Cheraw, S.C.; 24. Camden, S.C.; 25. North, S.C.; 26. Fairfax, S.C.; 27. Claxton, Ga.

29. McRae, Ga.; 30. Rochelle, Ga.

#### December

1. Ocilla, Ga.; 2. Nashville, Ga.; 3. Hazelhurst, Ga.; 4. Eastman, Ga. Season ends.

### Season of 1916

1916 was a year in which a big step upwards was taken. The show was substantially enlarged. It got to the size it would essentially stay at until it made the final step to a 20 car show in 1923. This year of 1916 it became a 15 car show - one advance, four stocks, four coaches and six flats. It might be interesting to point out here that at least one, and possibly more, of the flats was only a fifty footer rather than the more generally used sixty foot length. This statement is made

because of a picture, which see, of the flats being unloaded in Ithaca, New York, showing the last flat with the three cross cages we know the show then had and two other canvas covered wagons, either cages or tableau wagons, on it. This flat has to be only fifty feet long for a sixty footer would have carried, in addition to the three cross cages, three regular wagons of the length Sparks then used.

The show opened its season as it had generally done in recent years in its winter quarters town of Salisbury, North Carolina, on Monday, April 10 and then followed the route north used during the last few years through North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia into Ohio. The advance car ahead of the show was this year managed by C. S. Clarke. He had a crew of about fifteen men. T. W. Ballenger was still the General Agent responsible for the route. In addition to these, ahead of the show there were a Special Representative, an Advertising Manager, two Local Contractors, a Special Agent and a Twenty-four Hour Man. Even for a relatively small show such as Sparks it took a fairly sizeable group of people to prepare the way for its coming to the towns along its route.

Back on the show there were about 265 people or roughly 60 more than had been on the show the previous year. All of these were accommodated in four coaches so we can see that spacious sleeping arrangements were not the order of the day. Of course, it was the workmen who took the brunt of the crowding for their coach with three high bunks and two men to a bunk could squeeze in about 180 men. Hot nights must have been pretty uncomfortable for them and is probably the reason so many of them chose to sleep under the wagons on the flats, as dangerous as that might be. The remaining three coaches would have accommodated the rest of the show people, about 90 people, quite comfortably.

Some description of the various working departments staffs might be of interest. The draft stock department had 23 men of which eleven were drivers, one 8 horse, five 6 horse, and five 4 horse. The rest of the staff was the bosses, Jim Jacobs was still the Superintendent, two blacksmiths, and the drivers helpers. The ring stock was handled by a boss and eight grooms. The train crew of ten which loaded and unloaded the wagons from the flats had, among others, two ropers, two polers and four chockers.

The big top department which was also responsible for the menagerie and dressing room tops was again handled by George Singleton with a crew of 34. These included an assistant boss, one man to get up the front door, six men responsible for the seats, a ring maker, three in the stake and chain group and one sailmaker whose job it was to keep the tents in good shape. The rest drove the stakes and spread the canvas. Walter McGinnis with a crew of ten was responsible for the side show top, bannerline and the two pit show tops. If these seem like large crews compared to today's shows, it must be remembered that there was no mechanical stake driver (or any other mechanization) and every stake had to be driven by man powered sledge hammers, hot hard work on a hot day.

These canvas crews had a lot of tents to put up and tear down. The big top was a little small by standards of 15 car shows of that era. It was a 110 foot round top with two forty and one fifty foot middle pieces and it had only one row of quarter poles (there were 20). It had a center stage and two rings as in 1915. The reserved seats were eight high starbacks and the unreserved blues were twelve high.

The menagerie top was a 60 foot round with one 30 foot and two 20 foot middles and one row of quarter poles. It exhibited the six cages (three of them cross cages) two camels and five elephants. One of the elephants was Mary, a very large bull and the oldest elephant with the show. The main entrance to the show was the usual gable end two pole top about 25 by 22 feet.

The side show top was a 50 foot round with two 30 foot middles. It was fronted by eight double deck banners and a single width entrance banner. There

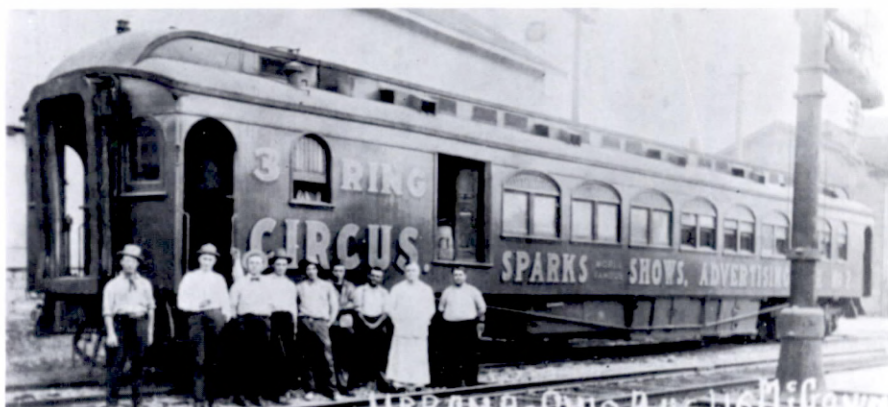
was also a 45 by 15 foot hip roof top for the pit show with three half banners fronting it. There was only one concession top on the midway, a startling contrast to shows of the 1970's. However, there was a ball toss doll rack with a fly top attached to the side of the side show canvas wagon.

The dressing -padroom top was the same size, approximately, as the side show top. There were three draft stock tops all with gable ends, two 25 by 45 feet and one 25 by 60 feet. Last but not least, the dining top was a 60 by 80 foot hip roof top while the cookhouse top was about 20 by 30 feet.

The most important department on any show in those days was the dining or commissary department. The ability of some shows to get and keep both workmen and performers of quality depended on the quality of their cookhouse. The Sparks Commissary Department headed by A. C. Orcutt and watched over by Mrs. Charles (Addie) Sparks was of the best. They used eight people in the kitchen including four cooks while the dining top had twelve waiters, each serving two tables or about twenty to twenty-two persons.

An interesting aspect of the midway was that there was only one concession stand (aside from the ball toss rack). "Food" was not a big item on the midways of shows in those days. However, seat sales in the big top were a substantial business as illustrated by the fact that Sparks had ten seatmen. The principal side show had six acts plus "Prof" Wrights Dixie Minstrels and band of nine pieces and two singers and dancers.

After getting into the big top the audience saw a very credible performance. There were 42 performers including ten clowns, more than ever before, in the dressing room. This was a large group of performers for only a 15 car show. While we have no program for the show we do have some general comments from the *Billboard* together with a listing of what they considered the best of the show. Special mention was made of the DeMotts, premier equestrians; Woodford's posing animals; Sparks High School Horses; Capt. Tiebor's trained seals; Holland's riding act; Prof. Mayo's (Bert Mayo, Equestrian Director) pony on the revolving table; and "Hilary Long who slides down a wire on his head from the top of the tent to the ground, performs upside down on a trapeze and walks down steps upside down." It was remarked that this act would be a credit to a show twice as large. Apparently it was as good as reported for before the season ended it was announced that Hilary Long had been signed by the Ringling Worlds Greatest Shows for the season of 1917. In conclusion the review said the show "was one of the neatest outfits on the road." The costumes were fresh and



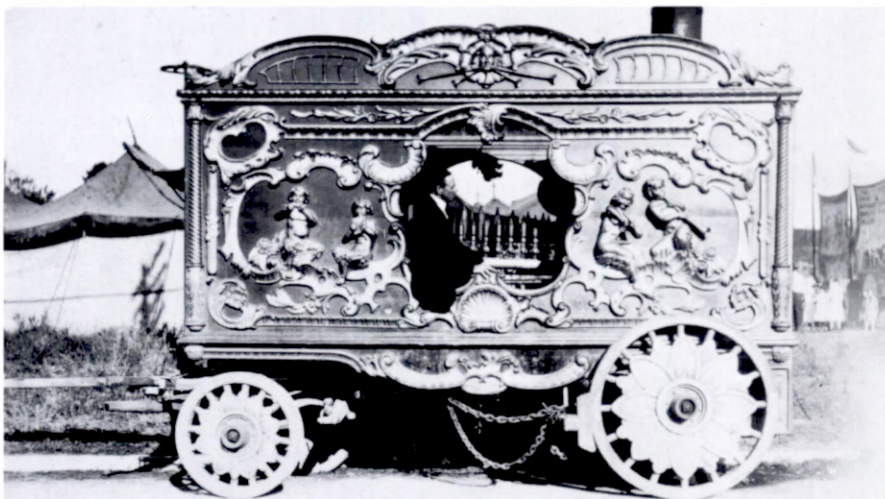
The advance car of the Sparks show in Urbana, Ohio, in 1916. C. S. Clarke, car manager is third from the left.

clean, the stock well groomed and the performance enjoyable.

Commenting about the parade it said that although it was not large it was one of the best ever seen and the stock was in fine condition. This type of comment seems to be consistent about the Sparks show and coming from various sources, as it did, must be believed. There were twelve wagons, several mounted groups, camels and the five elephants, making, as the reviewer commented not a large parade but certainly very adequate for a show of its size. When stretched out it was probably almost half a mile long and would have taken about eight to ten minutes to pass. The Ringling Brothers parade at that time took twenty-five minutes to pass although in total railroad cars it was five times larger.

In addition to the several four and six horse mounted groups the parade was

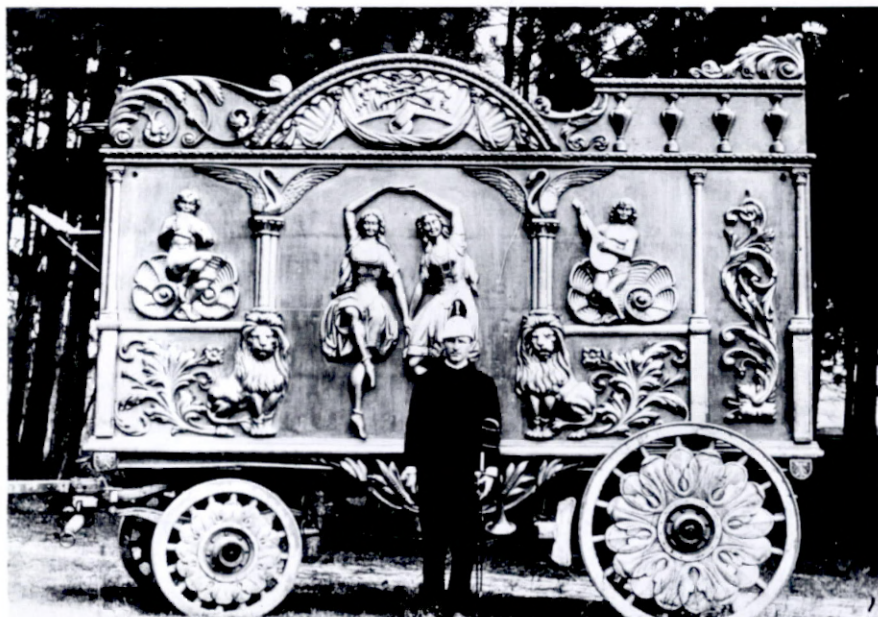
**This calliope arrived on the Sparks around 1914, probably built by Bode. These were the original sunburst wheels and mud boards, both changed when the wagon was later remodeled. Dunn Collection.**



led by two U.S. flag carrying horsemen. They were followed by the lead bandwagon. This was the "Dancing Girls" tableau which was new this year and was to remain with the show for the rest of the show's life. It carried about half of the big show band dressed in red uniforms with white pith helmets and was pulled by an eight horse hitch. The wagon had gold leafed carvings on a pale blue background. While not a large wagon, it being only 14 feet long, it was an ornate and striking one. In its first year its wheels had outside sunbursts. The band was led by Jack Phillips with eighteen other instruments. Phillips played the cornet and rode on the lead bandwagon along with nine others of the band. The remainder of the band rode on the "Grecian Girl" tableau which was pulled by a dapple six horse hitch.

There were as already noted three other tableau wagons. Two of them, the "Two Indian" tab and the "Mirror and Dragons" tab, were each pulled by six horse hitches and carried the side show band of nine pieces and clown band of seven pieces. The remaining tab, the "Grecian Girl," carried three or four lady performers and was pulled by a four white horse hitch.

The other wagons in the parade were the six cages of which three were of the



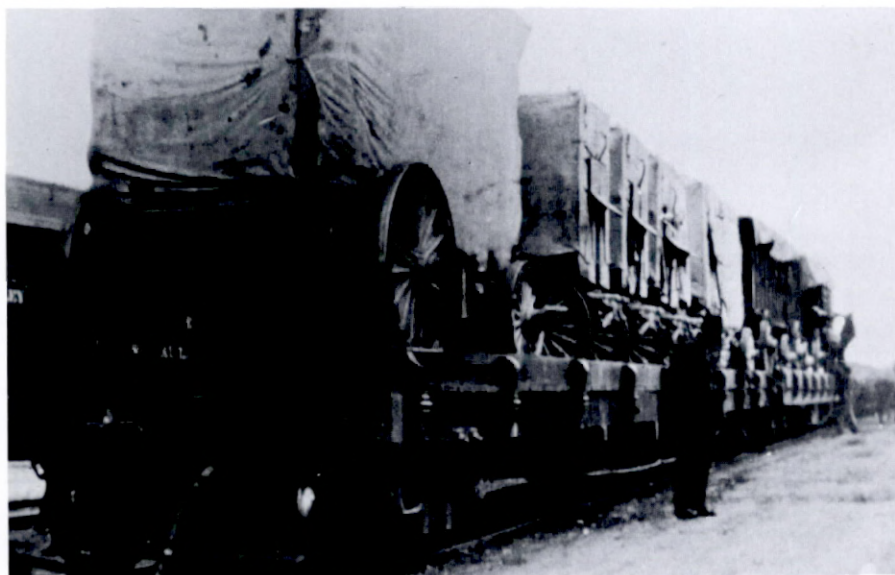
Charlie Duple standing in front of the Dancing Girls tab on Sparks Circus in 1916.

cross cage variety and the steam calliope which like the "Dancing Girl" tab was to remain on the show for as long as it paraded. The first steam calliope that the show had, the so called Gentry twin, had been disposed of at the end of the 1913 season. The steam calliope was pulled by a six horse hitch. The cages so far as can be determined were all pulled by four horse hitches except one of the cross cages which was pulled by the two Bactrian camels.

Only two events of reportable significance occurred during the season. One was a minor derailment of the train between Laurinburg and Monroe, North Carolina, on November 4. Only minor damage was sustained and no shows were lost. The other event, however, was of an entirely different and greater significance. It was in fact a kind of tragedy.

On September 12 at Kingsport, Tennessee, a new elephant boy was knocked down by Mary of the elephant herd and then crushed with her foot. The boy died instantly. This happened on a three block walk from the lot to a watering trough after the matinee performance. The boy had been prodding Mary with his bull hook to make her move faster and she had apparently become enraged. This happened in spite of a warning to the boy not to do this. After her momentary wildness and rage Mary immediately quieted down and caused no further trouble.

This loaded flat carries three cross cages and two tab wagons, or larger cages. It was the last flat car on the train.



However, to be on the safe side the elephant act was omitted from the evening performance.

The next day, September 13, at Erwin, Tennessee, although the elephants were in the parade and matinee performance with no evidence of trouble, Charles Sparks who had been greatly upset by Mary's action and concerned about the future decided to do away with her. So arrangements were made with the C&O R.R., on which road the show was then traveling, to execute her. During the afternoon performance a group of circus workers went to the railroad yards to dig a grave next to the tracks. When the afternoon show was over the five elephants were marched to the railroad yards. There a chain was placed around Mary's neck and a large railroad wrecking crane started to lift her. She started to shake as her front feet were lifted off the ground and the chain broke. Her front feet dropped to the ground but she made no attempt to run away. Then a heavy cable was looped about her neck and she was lifted clear off the ground. Gradually her body and trunk hung limp and after waiting for a period of time a Veterinary pronounced her dead. She was then lowered into the grave next to the tracks that had been prepared for her, her body covered with lime and the earth replaced.

While all this was happening the other four elephants stood quietly eating grass. After it was over they were marched back to the lot and it was on this walk that they began to swing their trunks and trumpet, apparently only then missing their leader. However, once back in the menagerie tent they quieted down. After that it was necessary to retrain them in their show routines without Mary, and it was several days before they finally became adjusted to their loss and their new way of life.

The route for the 1916 season after a lapse of two years again took the show into New England. After Ohio it went to Pennsylvania, West Virginia and back into Ohio before moving into Pennsylvania and New York. Then starting May 29 through the first week in August for a total of ten weeks it was in all six of the New England states ending the tour with a two day stand (the first in its history) at Bridgeport, Connecticut, Friday and Saturday, August 4 and 5.

The next four plus weeks they spent in Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia after which they moved south through Kentucky, Tennessee and into Georgia. After that they played a few stands in South Carolina and wound up the season playing their last four weeks in November in North Carolina closing the season at Concord on the 25th. The season was just two weeks short of being eight months long. About 2,500 miles less were covered



This fine view shows the loaded train with the big top pole wagon coming down the runs. This view taken in 1916 shows the standard wood flats used at the time. Pfening Collection.

this year than in 1915, the mileage being 11,138. North Carolina and Ohio had the most stands with 25 each. They were followed by Pennsylvania with 21, Georgia 19, Maine 17, Massachusetts 15, Tennessee 14, West Virginia 12 and Connecticut 11. The remaining 36 stands were in the other states mentioned above. All told it was a highly successful season.

## ROUTE SEASON 1916

April

12. Salisbury, N.C.; 13. High Point,

This midway view taken in 1914 shows an opening being made for the side show. A few members of the 12 piece side show band are on the bally platform. This band was lead by the famous Prof. Arthur A. Wright, king of side show band leaders. As late as 1947 Wright conducted a 15 piece band in the side show of the Ringling-Barnum Circus. Pfening Collection.



N.C.; 14. Reidsville, N. C.; 15. Danville, Va.; 16. Altavista, Va.; 17. Salem, Va.

19. Princeton, W. Va.; 20. Oak Hill, W. Va.; 21. Mt. Hope, W. Va.; 22. Beckley, W. Va.; 23. Hinton, W. Va.; 24. Marlinton, W. Va.

This lot view taken in 1916 shows the full layout. The side show is on the left of the midway and a pit show on the lower right. Pfening Collection.



26. Elkins, W. Va.; 27. Davis, W. Va.;  
28. Piedmont, W. Va.; 29. Grafton, W.  
Va.; 30. Weston, W. Va.

#### May

1. Uniontown, Penn.; 2. Morgantown,  
Penn.; 3. Fairmount, W. Va.; 4.  
Clarkeburg, W. Va.; 5. Grafton, W. Va.;  
6. Bellaire, Ohio

8. Canal Dover, Ohio; 9. Coshocton,  
Ohio; 10. Mingo Jct., Ohio; 11.  
Carnegie, Penn.; 12. Donora, Penn.; 13.  
New Kensington, Pa.

15. Vandergrift, Pa.; 16. East Brady,  
Penn.; 17. Titusville, Penn.; 18. Kane,  
Penn. (Snowed); 19. Salamanca, N. Y.;  
20. Bradford, Penn.

22. Hornell, N. Y.; 23. Corning, N. Y.;  
24. Ithaca, N. Y.; 25. Owego, N. Y.; 26.  
Port Jervis, N. Y.; 27. Poughkeepsie, N.  
Y.

29. Naugatuck, Conn.; 30. Torrington,  
Conn.; 31. Winstead, Conn.

#### June

1. Bristol, Conn.; 2. New Britain,  
Conn.; 3. Middletown, Conn.

5. Williamantic, Conn.; 6. New Lon-  
don, Conn.; 7. Westerly, R. I.; 8. Paw-  
tucket, R. I.; 9. Taunton, Mass.; 10.  
Framingham, Mass.

12. Marlboro, Mass.; 13. Clinton,  
Mass.; 14. Gardner, Mass.; 15. Athol,  
Mass.; 16. Greenfield, Mass.; 17. Keene,  
N. H.

19. Bellows Falls, Vt.; 20. Claremont,  
N. H.; 21. Concord, N. H.; 22. Franklin,  
N. H.; 23. Laconia, N. H.; 24. Plymouth,  
N. H.

26. Woodville, N. H.; 27. St.  
Johnsbury, Vt.; 28. Littleton, N. H.; 29.  
Berlin, N. H.; 30. South Paris, Maine

#### July

1. Rumford Falls, Maine; 3. Houlton,  
Maine; 4. Caribou, Maine; 5. Fort Kent,  
Maine; 6. Van Buren, Maine; 7. Presque  
Isle, Maine; 8. Millinocket, Maine

10. Calais, Maine; 11. Eastport,  
Maine; 12. Machais, Maine; 13. Dexter,  
Maine; 14. Bath, Maine; 15. Rockland,  
Maine

17. Sanford, Maine; 18. Dover, Maine;  
19. Exeter, Maine; 20. Haverhill, Mass.;  
21. Gloucester, Mass.; 22. Milford,  
Mass.

24. Quincy, Mass.; 25. Plymouth,  
Mass.; 26. Falmouth, Mass.; 27. Hyannis,  
Mass.; 28. Wareham, Mass.; 29.  
Newport, R. I.

31. Bristol, R. I.

#### August

1. Woonsocket, R. I.; 2. Rockville,  
Conn.; 3. Derby, Conn.; 4. Bridgeport,  
Conn.; 5. Bridgeport, Conn. (Two Day  
Stand)

7. So. Bethlehem, Penn.; 8. Tamaqua,  
Penn.; 9. Hazelton, Penn.; 10.  
Lewisburg, Penn.; 11. Galitzin, Penn.;  
12. Windber, Penn.

14. Charleroi, Penn.; 15. Wash-  
ington, Penn.; 16. Barnesville, O.; 17.  
McConnellsville, O.; 18. Caldwell, O.;  
19. Millersburg, O.

21. London, O.; 22. Bellefontaine, O.;  
23. Gallion, O.; 24. Ashland, O.; 25.  
Wadsworth, O.; 26. Richwood, O.

28. Urbana, O.; 29. Middletown, O.; 30.  
Wilmingon, O.; 31. Lebanon, O.



The clerestory office wagon in 1916, believed to be new that year, one of the wagons added with the addition of the sixth flat car.

#### September

1. Georgetown, O.; 2. Peebles, O.

4. Huntington, W. Va.; 5. Logan, W.  
Va.; 6. Hurricane, W. Va.; 7. Paints-  
ville, Ky.; 8. Pikesville, Ky.; 9. Jenkins,  
Ky.

11. St. Paul, Va.; 12. Kingsport, Tenn.;  
13. Erwin, Tenn.; 14. Johnson City,  
Tenn.; 15. Rogersville, Tenn.; 16. Ap-  
palachia, Va.

18. Middlesboro, Ky.; 19. Corbin, Ky.;  
20. Stamford, Ky.; 21. Campbellsville,  
Ky.; 22. Bardstown, Ky.; 23. Glasgow,  
Ky.

25. Russellville, Ky.; 26. Clarks-  
ville, Tenn.; 27. Springfield, Tenn.; 28.  
Galatin, Tenn.; 29. Pulaski, Tenn.; 30.  
Laurenceburg, Tenn.

#### October

2. Columbia, Tenn.; 3. Fayetteville,  
Tenn.; 4. Tulahoma, Tenn.; 5. Mur-

The Grecian Statue tab in a parade of Sparks Circus in 1916. This wagon was only 12½ feet long and was typical of the small tabs on this show.



freesboro, Tenn.; 6. Winchester, Tenn.;  
7. Calhoun, Ga.

9. Covington, Ga.; 10. Greensboro,  
Ga.; 11. Washington, Ga.; 12. Thomson,  
Ga.; 13. Sparta, Ga.; 14. Tennille, Ga.

16. Dublin, Ga.; 17. Hawkinsville,  
Va.; 18. Fitzgerald, Ga.; 19. Moultrie,  
Ga.; 20. Thomasville, Va.; 21. Camilla,  
Ga.

23. Quitman, Ga.; 24. Adel, Ga.; 25.  
Tifton, Ga.; 26. Douglas, Ga.; 27.  
Waycross, Ga.; 28. Jessup, Ga.

30. Walterboro, S. C.; 31. Florence, S.  
C.

#### November

1. Rowland, N. C.; 2. Raeford, N. C.; 3.  
Laurinburg, N. C. (Train wrecked); 4.  
Monroe, N. C.

6. Rockingham, N. C.; 7. Sandford, N.  
C.; 8. Louisburg, N. C.; 9. Oxford, N. C.;  
10. Warrenton, N. C.; 11. Littleton, N. C.

13. Enfield, N. C.; 14. Robersonville,  
N. C.; 15. Fremont, N. C.; 16. Clinton, N.  
C.; 17. Wallace, N. C.; 18. Mount Olive,  
N. C.

20. Smithfield, N. C.; 21. Burlington,  
N. C.; 22. Highpoint, N. C.; 23. Lex-  
ington, N. C.; 24. Albemarle, N. C.; 25.  
Concord, N. C.; 26. Salisbury, N. C.

Season Ends

# Protesting "The Perilous Performances"

By John Lentz

Two performers of great prominence in circus history — Blondin and Leotard — were acclaimed far and wide by the public and the press for their respective accomplishments as a rope walker and a trapezist. As most everyone knows, Blondin's greatest feat was that of crossing Niagara Falls on a tightrope. Leotard's fame does not rest on any one spectacular feat. Rather, as the original young man on the flying trapeze, his elegant acrobatics set the style for all flying acts that have since graced circus performances.

Yet, when these artists were at the height of their fame, they were not

Jean Francois Gravelet was the real name of the famous Blondin, perhaps the first well known high rope walker. Pfening Collection.



The Famous Blondin

without their detractors. In fact, they were denounced and criticized by some segments of the press and the public for their "perilous performances". Records concerning the criticisms leveled at both Blondin and Leotard recently came to light in the archives of the Ringling Museum of the Circus. Contained in a dog-eared scrapbook kept in the 1860's by an unknown person, these records reflect the attitudes of yesterday's audiences toward risky displays. We offer some of them here.

From the famed British journal, *Punch*, issue of September 13, 1862: "Has it ever occurred to you that by attending these performances (of Blondin and Leotard) you are aiding and abetting to put a human life in danger, and encouraging, maybe, a taste for suicide? With all their skill, Monsieurs Blondin and Leotard cannot make themselves proof against the freaks of nature or those physical contingencies which every human frame is heir to. A sudden cramp or spasm, or a momentary giddiness, would suffice to stretch the acrobat a corpse upon the floor, and make every spectator feel as though he had been an accessory to manslaughter....The love of perilous performances is merely a new form of the old gladiator gusto with which the bloody circus scenes were relished in old Rome. The less you go to places of amusement with the chance of seeing suicide, the better it will be for you and those with whom you have to do. When you are in Spain, be a Spaniard if you please; and go see a bullfight, and what brutal sports you like. But do not carry home with you your relish for perilous performances, or, by giving them your patronage, encourage their existence."

During one of his engagements, Blondin wheeled his young daughter across the tightrope in a wheelbarrow. This prompted the following letter to the editor of the *London Times*, June 15, 1861:

"Sir: Allow me through your columns to ask those who were at the Crystal Palace today if they approved of one of the acts in which a child aged seven was, for their supposed gratification, deliberately exposed to appalling risk of instant destruction by her own father?

"If I may judge by expressions which I heard, they did not approve

this unexpected horror....We believe he (Blondin) is incapable of appreciating the great risk to which he exposes his child, who, if anything were to go wrong, must fall 150 feet to the floor, while he, not improbably, might save himself by catching the rope. If this were to be the result of a mishap, what could be the verdict of the coroner's jury? It must be either murder or manslaughter.

"You would, sir, do well to encourage the English public, whether parents or not, to stay away from the exhibition until this revolting act is stopped."

In a column entitled "Acrobatic Apes Wanted", *Punch*, issue of

Jules Leotard is pictured wearing his skin tight costume that was to become the leotard. This photo was made around 1860. Pfening Collection.





A print from the Ringling Museum of the Circus collection shows Jules Leotard in flight.

November 22, 1862, continued to lambast Blondin and Leotard:

"The taste for seeing fellow creatures put their lives and limbs in danger we cannot call 'romantic', but view rather as disgusting. It is not so much the skill of the performer that attracts audiences, as the peril he is placed in and the chance of seeing his neck broken. If monkeys could be trained to do the tightrope and trapeze business, they would soon eclipse the feats of Blondin and Leotard. Monkeys are by nature better fit for such achievements and having fewer brains than men, have no fear of falling. Surely, we repeat, it would be a good

Blondin carrying a man on his back during his rope walking act. Ringling Museum of the Circus.



Blondin carrying his wife across the tight rope. Ringling Museum of the Circus.

in places of public resort; and, if not, whether he would introduce a measure next session to enable the police and local authorities to prevent such exhibitions".

Blondin's feat at Niagara Falls caused no such outbursts of criticism or threats of legal action as occurred in England. But, one prominent American, William Dean Howells, concluded that the performance should have been barred by law.

After reading the English comments on "perilous performances", one wonders what drastic actions might have been taken had acts like the Wallendas and the Flying Gaonas appeared there in the 1860's.

Blondin eating his dinner on the rope. Ringling Museum of the Circus.



thing for humanity if acrobatic monkeys could be trained and exhibited. The lives of human beings then need not be endangered, and the public might be weaned from its present brutal taste for seeing men imperil their existence by attempting feats which monkeys could achieve with perfect safety, and far more ease and skill."

From *The Observer*, issue of August 17, 1862:

"We deplore the morbid taste which seems to pervade so large a part of the community, who revel in feats of danger, and take delight in seeing fellow creatures placed within a hair's-breadth of eternity. If a person attempts suicide, he becomes at once amenable to the law on a charge of felony. Why, then, should not rope dancers and trapezists not be subjected to the same law? Some years ago, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals prosecuted Simpson, the late proprietor of Cremore Gardens, for allowing a cow to be attached to a balloon, and he was compelled to discontinue the practice. If, then, we are so tender of the sufferings of the brute creation, surely we ought to be more tender towards our fellow men. If these acrobats have not sense enough to keep out of danger, they must be treated as dangerous lunatics and prevented by law from laying violent hands upon themselves. It is hoped that the Home Secretary will turn his attention to this subject without delay."

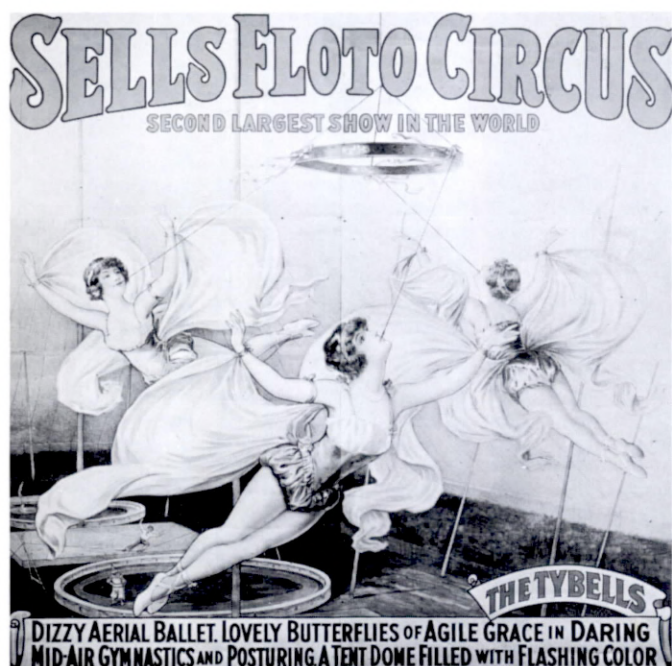


On July 22, 1863, the following item appears on the calendar of the House of Commons:

"DANGEROUS EXHIBITIONS. Mr. Doulton gave notice that tomorrow he would ask the Home Secretary whether there was any provision in existing law to prevent exhibitions which were dangerous to life and limb

# Sells-Floto Circus 1923 Lithos

All of these posters were used in 1923 and were printed by the Strobridge Lithograph Co., of Cincinnati, Ohio. These reproductions have been made from official photos from the Strobridge files. The litho photos are now part of the Harold Dunn Collection.



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**ERMA WARD** AERIAL GYMNAST SUPREME  
 HANGING BY ONE HAND FAR ALOFT, THIS  
 WORLD'S WONDER GIRL THROWS HER BODY  
 OVER HER SHOULDER 144 TIMES  
 AS THOUSANDS SCREAM ACCLAIM.

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 DEFEYING BODILY STRUCTURE  
 IN BONE-BREAKING REVOLUTIONS



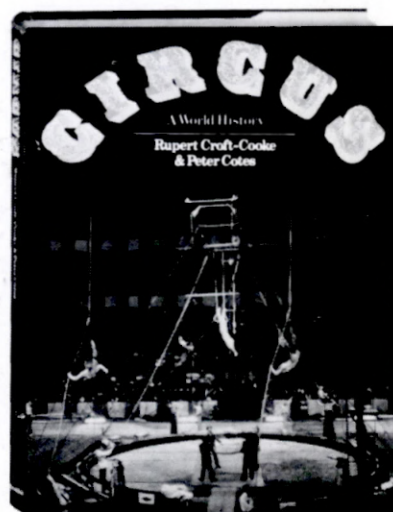
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